

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRA

VOLUME V

EURIPIDE

ALCESTIS

THE MEDEA

THE HERACLEIDAI

HIPPOLYTUS

THE CYCLOPS

HERACLES

IPHIGENIA IN TAUR

Edited by DAVID GRENE and HMOND I



ALCESTIS

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THE MEDEA

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HIPPOLYTUS

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THE CYCLOPS, HERACLES, IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

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CONTENTS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION	3
Richmond Lattimore	
INTRODUCTION TO ALCESTIS	9
Richmond Lattimore	
ALCESTIS	15
Richmond Lattimore	
INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDEA	67
Rex Warner	
THE MEDEA	71
Rex Warner	
INTRODUCTION TO THE HERACLEIDAE	127
Richmond Lattimore	
THE HERACLEIDAE	133
Ralph Gladstone	
INTRODUCTION TO HIPPOLYTUS	175
David Grene	

HIPPOLYTUS

David Grene

INTRODUCTION TO CYCLOPS

William Arrowsmith

CYCLOPS

William Arrowsmith

INTRODUCTION TO HERACLES

William Arrowsmith

HERACLES

William Arrowsmith

INTRODUCTION TO IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Richmond Lattimore

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

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THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

VOLUME V

EURIPIDES I

ALCESTIS

THE MEDEA

THE HERACLEIDAE

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HERACLES

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

We are told that Euripides, the son of Mnesarchus or Mnesarchides, was born at some time between 485 and 480 B.C., presented his first set of tragedies in 455, and won his first victory in 441, won only four victories during his lifetime, left Athens probably in 408 for the court of King Archelaus of Macedon, and died there late in 407 or early in 406. He wrote perhaps eighty-eight plays (twenty-two sets of four); nineteen survive under his name, though *Rhesus* may not be his.

Such seems to be the basic and believable vita (though I suspect that the dates for birth and first presentation are too early). We may ignore the fanciful gossip that passes for additional biography, but consider the critical opinions of the comic poets. The conclusion is that Euripides was only moderately successful in his own lifetime, though famous and influential after death. He won seldom but produced again and again. He was parodied and ridiculed by the comic poets more often and more brutally (and more intelligently, too) than any other literary man in Athens. This fact itself means that he made more of an impression than the now obscure competitors who must have beaten him again and again.

Plainly, he wrote shockers, and it is not enough to say that this was because he was an innovator. He was, but so were his predecessors. Aeschylus was more daring, drastic, and original; Sophocles was no serene and static classicist. Perhaps the most significant remark about Euripides and Sophocles is that supposed to have been made by Sophocles, that he himself showed men as they ought to be (or as one ought to show them) but Euripides showed them as they actually were. Whether or not Sophocles ever said this, it is true. Euripides

E U R I P I D E S

was basically a realist, despite contrary tendencies toward fantasy and romance. The only materials available for his tragedies were the old heroic sagas. He used them as if they told the story not of characters heroic in all dimensions, but of real everyday people. From the high legends of Jason and Heracles he chose to enact the moments of the heroes' decay and disintegration. What, he asks, does it feel like to have your wife die for you, and what kind of man will let her do it? What does it feel like to have murdered your mother? His Admetus fights hard to deceive himself, but we all see that he is a coward; his Orestes is a bad mental case with fits and seizures. Creusa, brutally violated by Apollo and then robbed of the baby she had guiltily borne, does not dance decorously out of the story like Pindar's Evadne in similar circumstances; the shame sticks with her, as if she were a real girl with a real experience; and Apollo, while managing that all comes well in the end, hides behind his temple and lets his sister speak for him.

Though the judges of Dionysus disapproved, there cannot be much doubt that the audience was fascinated even when it was not pleased. Was this enough, though? The sense of defeat and disappointment is constantly there in Euripides. It makes him bring to the fore those who are weak or oppressed, the despised and misunderstood: women, children, slaves, captives, strangers, barbarians. Women as chief characters outnumber men, and most of his choruses are female. It is not that he is "for" them or "against" them; he merely tries to present action from their point of view, and they fascinate him. So do children, but here his realism fails: obviously, he knew little about them. His servants are true to life, while his heroes who deliver the oppressed are wooden.

Euripides is sometimes perhaps more pathetic than tragic. The hero (or heroine) in Sophocles is prepared to fight stubbornly to the last; his Teucer, alone against an army full of warriors who could beat him singlehanded, acts as if he were the champion with an army at his back. Many characters of Euripides spend all their time trying to run away from something. Ion and Hippolytus are blissfully happy only while they

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

lead do-nothing lives; then the real world with its entanglements catches up with them, and they are miserable. His choruses are not the first to long for the wings of the dove, but they do it oftenest; in him the drive to escape becomes an insistent, recurrent motive. Even his own invention, bright optimistic romantic comedy, becomes drama of escape. Usually, escape is impossible. He believed in a world he disliked. His gods represent this world.

With Euripides, tragedy is either transcending itself or going into a decline, in any case turning into something else. If Euripides is less of a master in his own medium than Aeschylus and Sophocles, it is partly because he was less happy in that medium. This shows in faults which his greatest admirers will concede. His pathos may degenerate into sentimentality. There are signs of haste, slovenliness, in consequence, windiness, in most of his best plays. Some whole plays are mediocre. His most characteristic fault is to try to get too much into a single plot or character or situation. His *Medea* is several kinds of woman unsuccessfully assembled; his *Andromache* has two badly connected plots. He wrote some lovely lyrics, but often (as in *Helen*) they have nothing to do with what is going on in the play. And so on. His faults are obvious. Equally obvious is his genius. He is the father of the romantic comedy, the problem play. He has given us a series of unforgettable characters. There has never been anyone else like him.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE

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ALCESTIS

Translated and with an Introduction by

RICHMOND LATTIMORE

INTRODUCTION TO ALCESTIS

The Legend

The origins of the story as it is told by Euripides are difficult to trace. We hear of Admetus and of Alcestis, "loveliest of all the daughters of Pelias," in the *Iliad*, but only as parents of Eumelus, one of the Achaeans at Troy. There is an allusion to the story as Euripides tells it in the *skolion* or drinking catch attributed to the little-known poetess Praxilla:

Mark the saying of Admetus, dear friend, and make friends with the brave.

Keep away from cowards, knowing that there is little grace in them.

We also know that Phrynicus, a dramatic poet of the early fifth century, used what seems to have been essentially the same version as that which Euripides followed. The best conclusion, though it is tentative, is that Euripides did not add any "facts" to the legend as he received it. The originality of the play would rather lie in the way in which he approached a known, though not particularly well-known, story from a new angle and with a new emphasis.

The Play

Grant, then, the basic outline of the plot: Alcestis voluntarily dying for her husband when his father and mother would not; Alcestis and Admetus delivered by Admetus' true friend, Heracles, who is guided by the remote hand of Apollo, also a true friend of Admetus. One may emphasize the heroism of Alcestis and the staunchness of Heracles, as against the way in which mother and father fail wretchedly in the crisis. This is as far as our *skolion* goes, for whether or not "the brave"

designates both Alcestis and Heracles or only one, "cowards" means the mother and father, not Admetus himself. Admetus is merely the subject about whom these operations, of dying or refusing to die, revolve; his own character does not come into question.

Euripides took a different kind of interest. He gives Alcestis full honors. The beginning of the play is all hers, and she is the center of all memories throughout the play. If she appears cold and self-righteous, if she reserves her passion, on stage, for her children, and talks only business with Admetus, this is rather the embarrassment of being disappointed in him than coldness. Endearments addressed to Admetus at this time would be intolerable. Her true nature is brought out by what servants and others have to say about her. Pheres, the father, is effectively dealt with in his one scene. It is true he wins his argument, but all the justification in the world does not save him from being a horrible old man. But the principal character is Admetus. The theme of the drama is not "if a wife dies for her husband, how brave and devoted the wife," so much as "if a husband lets his wife die for him, what manner of man must that husband be?"

Admetus is drawn to the life, without mercy. He has all the superficial graces and sincerely loves his wife and children, but he lacks the courage to die as he ought instead of letting his wife die for him; and, further, he lacks the courage to admit, to himself or anyone else, that he ought to be dying but dare not do it. He has, however, one solid virtue. For if he and Alcestis are at last saved not by his own strength and resolution but by Heracles under authority of Apollo, yet there is good reason why these august persons should be so devoted to him. Admetus is the best of friends. The right treatment of guests is a passion, almost an obsession, with him, and in this matter his conviction makes him firm enough to override so great a man as Heracles, with a show of force quite different from his ungrounded violence against Pheres. We may call him hospitable. But if we do, we must understand that, while the lavish entertainment of visitors was a special tradition in Thessaly, the hospitality of Admetus goes far beyond this and

INTRODUCTION

is no merely sociable virtue. Rather, this is the old Homeric *xenia*. It is one of the steps by which society progresses from savagery to civilization, when strangers make a willing, immediate, and permanent agreement to be friends. In this sense, *xenia* also includes cases at least of the nonabuse of power against those over whom one has power. Apollo, for punishment, was put at the mercy of Admetus, and Admetus gave him fair and friendly treatment (ll. 8-10; 222-24; 568-79). A different king might have reveled in his power over such a subject and acted outrageously. This is what Laomedon, king of Troy, did to Apollo and Poseidon (*Iliad* xxi. 441-60), and Poseidon never forgave him or his people. So, too, with Heracles, generous hospitality for the tramping hero becomes more than just a matter of correctness or etiquette when one thinks of such "hosts" as Procrustes, Sciron, and Antaeus. Violation of the rights of *xenia* is an underlying theme which directs the action in both the story of Troy and the story of Odysseus. The sin of Laomedon provoked divine rage against Troy; then Paris doomed the city when, after being properly received in the house of Menelaus, he went off with his host's wife and most of his furniture. Decisive for the action of the *Odyssey* is that travesty of *xenia* performed by the suitors when they settle down and make themselves intolerably at home in the house of Odysseus.

If we adopt the admittedly somewhat hypothetical scheme according to which tragedy consists in the destruction or self-destruction of an otherwise great man through some fault or flaw in his character, then *Alcestis* might be viewed as a kind of inverted tragedy. For this hero, otherwise no better than ordinary, has one significant *virtue*, which *saves* him. Thus, again, the progress of the play is from ruin to safety, reversing what might be considered the normal course of tragedy. I would not press this view, although I think there is a little truth in it, because Euripides would have had to have a formula for tragedy before he could invert it, and we do not know that he had such a formula. At any rate, the "comic" qualities of *Alcestis* have puzzled critics since ancient times. It was played fourth in the set, in the position usually given to

E U R I P I D E S

a satyr-play. But attempts to explain *Alcestis* as a modified satyr-play are not convincing, and the comic elements are not highly significant. Heracles may momentarily be a moderately funny drunk, but that is about all. The squabble between Admetus and Pheres, in which both really lose, is too humanly disagreeable to be funny; the squabble between Apollo and Death is grotesque, but scarcely uproarious. *Alcestis* is no satyr-play, but a tragicomedy which in part (loss, escape, reunion) anticipates the lighter escape-dramas (*Iphigeneia in Tauris*, *Helen*) still to come. But it goes deeper than these do.

Date and Circumstances

Alcestis was presented in 438 B.C. The first three plays in the set (all lost) were *The Women of Crete*, *Alcmaeon in Psophis*, and *Telephus*. Thus *Alcestis* is the earliest extant work of Euripides, with the possible exception of *The Cyclops* and (very doubtful) *Rhesus*, which are undated. Euripides won second place, being beaten by Sophocles.

Text

I have followed Murray's Oxford text, and used his line numbers, which are standard; except that I have adopted different readings which affect the translation of the following lines: 50, 124, 223, 943, 1140, 1153.

CHARACTERS

Apollo

Death

Chorus of citizens of Pheræ

Maid, attendant of Alcestis

Alcestis, wife of Admetus

Admetus of Pheræ, king of Thessaly

Boy (Eumelus), son of Admetus and Alcestis

Heracles

Pheres, father of Admetus

Servant of Admetus

Girl, daughter of Admetus and Alcestis (silent character)

Servants (silent)

ALCESTIS

SCENE: *Phœre, in Thessaly, before the house of Admetus.*
The front door of the house, or palace, is the center of the backdrop.

(Enter Apollo from the house, armed with a bow.)

Apollo

House of Admetus, in which I, god though I am,
had patience to accept the table of the serfs!
Zeus was the cause. Zeus killed my son, Asclepius,
and drove the bolt of the hot lightning through his chest.
I, in my anger for this, killed the Cyclopes,
smiths of Zeus's fire, for which my father made me serve
a mortal man, in penance for my misdoings.

I came to this country, tended the oxen of this host
and friend, Admetus, son of Phœre. I have kept
his house from danger, cheated the Fates to save his life
until this day, for he revered my sacred rights
sacredly, and the fatal goddesses allowed

Admetus to escape the moment of his death
by giving the lower powers someone else to die
instead of him. He tried his loved ones all in turn,
father and aged mother who had given him birth,
and found not one, except his wife, who would consent
to die for him, and not see daylight any more.

She is in the house now, gathered in his arms and held
at the breaking point of life, because the destiny marks
this for her day of death and taking leave of life.

The stain of death in the house must not be on me. I

step therefore from these chambers dearest to my love.
 And here is Death himself, I see him coming, Death
 who dedicates the dying, who will lead her down
 to the house of Hades. He has come on time. He has
 been watching for this day on which her death falls due.

25

(Enter Death, armed with a sword, from the wing.
He sees Apollo suddenly and shows surprise.)

Death

Ah!

You at this house, Phoebus? Why do you haunt
 the place. It is unfair to take for your own
 and spoil the death-spirits' privileges.
 Was it not enough, then, that you blocked the death
 of Admetus, and overthrew the Fates
 by a shabby wrestler's trick? And now
 your bow hand is armed to guard her too,
 Alcestis, Pelias' daughter, though she
 promised her life for her husband's.

30

35

Apollo

Never fear. I have nothing but justice and fair words for
 you.

Death

If you mean fairly, what are you doing with a bow?

Apollo

It is my custom to carry it with me all the time.

40

Death

It is your custom to help this house more than you ought.

Apollo

But he is my friend, and his misfortunes trouble me.

Death

You mean to take her body, too, away from me?

A L C E S T I S

Apollo

I never took *his* body away from you by force.

Death

How is it, then, that he is above ground, not below?

45

Apollo

He gave his wife instead, and you have come for her now.

Death

I have. And I shall take her down where the dead are.

Apollo

Take her and go. I am not sure you will listen to me.

Death

Tell me to kill whom I must kill. Such are my orders.

Apollo

No, only to put their death off. They must die in the end. 50

Death

I understand what you would say and what you want.

Apollo

Is there any way, then, for Alcestis to grow old?

Death

There is not. I insist on enjoying my rights too.

Apollo

You would not take more than one life, in any case.

Death

My privilege means more to me when they die young.

55

Apollo

If she dies old, she will have a lavish burial.

Death

What you propose, Phoebus, is to favor the rich.

Apollo

What is this? Have you unrecognized talents for debate?

Death

Those who could afford to buy a late death would buy it then.

Apollo

I see. Are you determined not to do this for me?

60

Death

I will not do it. And you know my character.

Apollo

I know it: hateful to mankind, loathed by the gods.

Death

You cannot always have your way where you should not.

Apollo

For all your brute ferocity you shall be stopped.

The man to do it is on the way to Pheres' house
now, on an errand from Eurystheus, sent to steal
a team of horses from the wintry lands of Thrace.

65

He shall be entertained here in Admetus' house
and he shall take the woman away from you by force,
nor will you have our gratitude, but you shall still
be forced to do it, and to have my hate beside.

70

Death

Much talk. Talking will win you nothing. All the same,
the woman goes with me to Hades' house. I go
to take her now, and dedicate her with my sword,
for all whose hair is cut in consecration
by this blade's edge are devoted to the gods below.

75

A L C E S T I S

(*Death enters the house. Apollo leaves by the wing. The Chorus enters and forms a group before the gates.*)

Chorus

It is quiet by the palace. What does it mean?
Why is the house of Admetus so still?
Is there none here of his family, none
who can tell us whether the queen is dead
and therefore to be mourned? Or does Pelias'
daughter Alcestis live still, still look
on daylight, she who in my mind appears
noble beyond
all women beside in a wife's duty?

80

85

(*Here they speak individually, not as a group.*)

First Citizen

Does someone hear anything?
The sound a hand's stroke would make,
or outcry, as if something were done
and over?

Second Citizen

No. And there is no servant stationed
at the outer gates. O Paean,
healer, might you show in light
to still the storm of disaster.

90

Third Citizen

They would not be silent if she were dead.

Fourth Citizen

No, she is gone.

Fifth Citizen

They have not taken her yet from the house.

Sixth Citizen

So sure? I know nothing. Why are you certain?

95

E U R I P I D E S

And how could Admetus have buried his wife
with none by, and she so splendid?

Seventh Citizen

Here at the gates I do not see
the lustral spring water, approved
by custom for a house of death.

100

Eighth Citizen

Nor are there cut locks of hair at the forecourts
hanging, such as the stroke of sorrow
for the dead makes. I can hear no beating
of the hands of young women.

Ninth Citizen

Yet this is the day appointed.

105

Tenth Citizen

What do you mean? Speak.

Ninth Citizen

On which she must pass to the world below.

Eleventh Citizen

You touch me deep, my heart, where it hurts.

Twelfth Citizen

Yes. He who from the first has claimed to be called
a good man himself
must grieve when good men are afflicted.

110

(*Henceforward all the Chorus together.*)

Sailing the long sea, there is
not any place on earth
you could win, not Lycia,
not the unwatered sands called
of Ammon, not

115

thus to approach and redeem the life
of this unhappy woman. Her fate shows
steep and near. There is no god's hearth
I know you could reach and by sacrifice
avail to save.

120

There was only one. If the eyes
of Phoebus' son were opened
still, if he could have come
and left the dark chambers,
the gates of Hades.

125

He upraised those who were stricken
down, until from the hand of God
the flown bolt of thunder hit him.

Where is there any hope for life
left for me any longer?

130

For all has been done that can be done by our kings now,
and there on all the gods' altars
are blood sacrifices dripping in full,
but no healing comes for the evil.

135

(Enter a maid from the house.)

Chorus

But here is a serving woman coming from the house.
The tears break from her. What will she say has taken
place?

We must, of course, forgive your sorrow if something
has happened to your masters. We should like to know
whether the queen is dead or if she is still alive.

140

Maid

I could tell you that she is still alive or that she is dead.

Chorus

How could a person both be dead and live and see?

Maid

It has felled her, and the life is breaking from her now.

Chorus

Such a husband, to lose such a wife. I pity you.

Maid

The master does not see it and he will not see it
until it happens.

145

Chorus

There is no hope left she will live?

Maid

None. This is the day of destiny. It is too strong.

Chorus

Surely, he must be doing all he can for her.

Maid

All is prepared so he can bury her in style.

Chorus

Let her be sure, at least, that as she dies, there dies
the noblest woman underneath the sun, by far.

150

Maid

Noblest? Of course the noblest, who will argue that?
What shall the wife be who surpasses her? And how
could any woman show that she loves her husband more
than herself better than by consent to die for him?
But all the city knows that well. You shall be told
now how she acted in the house, and be amazed
to hear. For when she understood the fatal day
was come, she bathed her white body with water drawn
from running streams, then opened the cedar chest and
took

155

her clothes out, and dressed in all her finery
and stood before the Spirit in the Hearth, and prayed:
"Mistress, since I am going down beneath the ground,
I kneel before you in this last of all my prayers.

Take care of my children for me. Give the little girl
a husband; give the little boy a generous wife;

160

165

and do not let my children die like me, who gave
them birth, untimely. Let them live a happy life
through to the end and prosper here in their own land." 170
Afterward she approached the altars, all that stand
in the house of Admetus, made her prayers, and decked
them all

with fresh sprays torn from living myrtle. And she wept
not at all, made no outcry. The advancing doom
made no change in the color and beauty of her face.
But then, in their room, she threw herself upon the bed, 175
and there she did cry, there she spoke: "O marriage bed
it was here that I undressed my maidenhood and gave
myself up to this husband for whose sake I die.

Goodbye. I hold no grudge. But you have been my death
and mine alone. I could not bear to play him false. 180
I die. Some other woman will possess you now.
She will not be better, but she might be happier."
She fell on the bed and kissed it. All the coverings
were drenched in the unchecked outpouring of her tears;
but after much crying, when all her tears were shed, 185
she rolled from the couch and walked away with eyes cast
down,

began to leave the room, but turned and turned again
to fling herself once more upon the bed. Meanwhile
the children clung upon their mother's dress, and cried,
until she gathered them into her arms, and kissed 190
first one and then the other, as in death's farewell.
And all the servants in the house were crying now
in sorrow for their mistress. Then she gave her hand
to each, and each one took it, there was none so mean
in station that she did not stop and talk with him. 195
This is what Admetus and the house are losing. Had
he died, he would have lost her, but in this escape
he will keep the pain. It will not ever go away.

Chorus

Admetus surely must be grieving over this
when such a wife must be taken away from him. 200

Maid

Oh yes, he is crying. He holds his wife close in his arms, imploring her not to forsake him. What he wants is impossible. She is dying. The sickness fades her now. She has gone slack, just an inert weight on the arm.

Still, though so little breath of life is left in her, 205
she wants to look once more upon the light of the sun, since this will be the last time of all, and never again.

She must see the sun's shining circle yet one more time.

Now I must go announce your presence. It is not everyone who bears so much good will toward our kings 210
as to stand by ready to help in their distress.

But you have been my master's friends since long ago.

(Exit.)

Chorus

O Zeus, Zeus, what way out of this evil
is there, what escape from this
which is happening to our princes?

A way, any way? Must I cut short my hair 215
for grief, put upon me the black
costume that means mourning?

We must, friends, clearly we must; yet still
let us pray to the gods. The gods
have power beyond all power elsewhere.

Paean, my lord, 220
Apollo, make some way of escape for Admetus.
Grant it, oh grant it. Once you found
rescue in him. Be now
in turn his redeemer from death.
Oppose bloodthirsty Hades.

Admetus,
O son of Pheres, what a loss
to suffer, when such a wife goes.
A man could cut his throat for this, for this
and less he could bind the noose upon his neck

and hang himself. For this is
not only dear, but dearest of all,
this wife you will see dead
on this day before you.

230

(*Alcestis is carried from the house on a litter,
supported by Admetus and followed by her
children and servants of the household.*)

But see, see,
she is coming out of the house and her husband is with
her.

Cry out aloud, mourn, you land
of Pherae for the bravest
of wives fading in sickness and doomed
to the Death God of the world below.

235

I will never again say that marriage brings
more pleasure than pain. I judge by what
I have known in the past, and by seeing now
what happens to our king, who is losing a wife
brave beyond all others, and must live a life
that will be no life for the rest of time.

240

Alcestis

Sun, and light of the day,
O turning wheel of the sky, clouds that fly.

245

Admetus

The sun sees you and me, two people suffering,
who never hurt the gods so they should make you die.

Alcestis

My land, and palace arching my land,
and marriage chambers of Iolcus, my own country.

Admetus

Raise yourself, my Alcestis, do not leave me now.
I implore the gods to pity you. They have the power.

250

Alcestis

I see him there at the oars of his little boat in the lake,
 the ferryman of the dead,
 Charon, with his hand upon the oar,
 and he calls me now: "What keeps you? 255
 Hurry, you hold us back." He is urging me on
 in angry impatience.

Admetus

The crossing you speak of is a bitter one for me;
 ill-starred; it is unfair we should be treated so.

Alcestis

Somebody has me, somebody takes me away, do you see,
 don't you see, to the courts 260
 of dead men. He frowns from under dark
 brows. He has wings. It is Death.
 Let me go, what are you doing, let go.
 Such is the road
 most wretched I have to walk.

Admetus

Sorrow for all who love you, most of all for me
 and for the children. All of us share in this grief. 265

Alcestis

Let me go now, let me down,
 flat. I have no strength to stand.
 Death is close to me.
 The darkness creeps over my eyes. O children,
 my children, you have no mother now,
 not any longer. Daylight is yours, 270
 my children. Look on it and be happy.

Admetus

Ah, a bitter word for me to hear,
 heavier than any death of my own.
 Before the gods, do not be so harsh 275

A L C E S T I S

as to leave me, leave your children forlorn.

No, up, and fight it.

There would be nothing left of me if you died.

All rests in you, our life, our not

having life. Your love is our worship.

Alcestis

Admetus, you can see how it is with me. Therefore,

280

I wish to have some words with you before I die.

I put you first, and at the price of my own life

made certain you would live and see the daylight. So

I die, who did not have to die, because of you.

I could have taken any man in Thessaly

285

I wished and lived in queenly state here in this house.

But since I did not wish to live bereft of you

and with our children fatherless, I did not spare

my youth, although I had so much to live for. Yet

your father, and the mother who bore you, gave you up,

290

though they had reached an age when it was good to die

and good to save their son and end it honorably.

You were their only one, and they had no more hope

of having other children if you died. That way

I would be living and you would live the rest of our time,

295

and you would not be alone and mourning for your wife

and tending motherless children. No, but it must be

that some god has so wrought that things shall be this

way.

So be it. But swear now to do, in recompense,

what I shall ask you—not enough, oh, never enough,

300

since nothing is enough to make up for a life,

but fair, and you yourself will say so, since you love

these children as much as I do; or at least you should.

Keep them as masters in my house, and do not marry

again and give our children to a stepmother

305

who will not be so kind as I, who will be jealous

and raise her hand to your children and mine. Oh no,

do not do that, do not. That is my charge to you.

For the new-come stepmother hates the children born

to a first wife, no viper could be deadlier.

310

The little boy has his father for a tower of strength.

[He can talk with him and be spoken to in turn.]

But you, my darling, what will your girlhood be like,

how will your father's new wife like you? She must not

make shameful stories up about you, and contrive

315

to spoil your chance of marriage in the blush of youth,

because your mother will not be there to help you

when you are married, not be there to give you strength

when your babies are born, when only a mother's help

will do.

For I must die. It will not be tomorrow, not

320

the next day, or this month, the horrible thing will come,

but now, at once, I shall be counted among the dead.

Goodbye, be happy, both of you. And you, my husband,

can boast the bride you took made you the bravest wife,

and you, children, can say, too, that your mother was

brave.

325

Chorus

Fear nothing; for I dare to speak for him. He will
do all you ask. If he does not, the fault is his.

Admetus

It shall be so, it shall be, do not fear, since you
were mine in life, you still shall be my bride in death
and you alone, no other girl in Thessaly
shall ever be called wife of Admetus in your place.

330

There is none such, none so marked out in pride of birth
nor beauty's brilliance, nor in anything else. I have
these children, they are enough; I only pray the gods
grant me the bliss to keep them as we could not keep you.

335

I shall go into mourning for you, not for just
a year, but all my life while it still lasts, my dear,
and hate the woman who gave me birth always, detest
my father. These were called my own people. They were
not.

You gave what was your own and dear to buy my life

340

ALCESTIS

and saved me. Am I not to lead a mourning life
 when I have lost a wife like you? I shall make an end
 of revelry and entertainment in my house,
 the flowers and the music that were found here once.
 No, I shall never touch the lutestrings ever again 345
 nor have the heart to play music upon the flute
 of Libya, for you took my joy in life with you.
 I shall have the skilled hand of an artificer
 make me an image of you to set in my room,
 pay my devotions to it, hold it in my arms 350
 and speak your name, and clasp it close against my heart,
 and think I hold my wife again, though I do not,
 cold consolation, I know it, and yet even so
 I might drain the weight of sorrow. You could come
 to see me in my dreams and comfort me. For they 355
 who love find a time's sweetness in the visions of night.
 Had I the lips of Orpheus and his melody
 to charm the maiden daughter of Demeter and
 her lord, and by my singing win you back from death,
 I would have gone beneath the earth, and not the hound 360
 of Pluto could have stayed me, not the ferrymen
 of ghosts, Charon at his oar. I would have brought you
 back
 to life. Wait for me, then, in that place, till I die,
 and make ready the room where you will live with me,
 for I shall have them bury me in the same chest 365
 as you, and lay me at your side, so that my heart
 shall be against your heart, and never, even in death
 shall I go from you. You alone were true to me.

Chorus

And I, because I am your friend and you
 are mine, shall help you bear this sorrow, as I should. 370

Alcestis

Children, you now have heard your father promise me
 that he will never marry again and not inflict
 a new wife on you, but will keep my memory.

Admetus

I promise. I will keep my promise to the end.

Alcestis

On this condition, take the children. They are yours.

375

Admetus

I take them, a dear gift from a dear hand.

Alcestis

And now
you must be our children's mother, too, instead of me.

Admetus

I must be such, since they will no longer have you.

Alcestis

O children, this was my time to live, and I must go.

Admetus

Ah me, what shall I do without you all alone.

380

Alcestis

Time will soften it. The dead count for nothing at all.

Admetus

Oh, take me with you, for God's love, take me there too.

Alcestis

No, I am dying in your place. That is enough.

Admetus

O God, what a wife you are taking away from me.

Alcestis

It is true. My eyes darken and the heaviness comes.

385

A L C E S T I S

Admetus

But I am lost, dear, if you leave me.

Alcestis

There is no use
in talking to me any more. I am not there.

Admetus

No, lift your head up, do not leave your children thus.

Alcestis

I do not want to, but it is goodbye, children.

Admetus

Look at them, oh look at them.

Alcestis

No. There is nothing more. 390

Admetus

Are you really leaving us?

Alcestis

Goodbye.

Admetus

Oh, I am lost.

Chorus

It is over now. Admetus' wife is gone from us.

Boy

O wicked fortune. Mother has gone down there,
father, she is not here with us
in the sunshine any more.

395

She was cruel and went away
and left me to live all alone.

Look at her eyes, look at her hands, so still.

Hear me, mother, listen to me, oh please,

400

listen, it is I, mother,

I your little one lean and kiss
your lips, and cry out to you.

Admetus

She does not see, she does not hear you. You and I
both have a hard and heavy load to carry now.

405

Boy

Father, I am too small to be left alone
by the mother I loved so much. Oh,
it is hard for me to bear
all this that is happening,
and you, little sister, suffer
with me too. Oh, father,
your marriage was empty, empty, she did not live
to grow old with you.

410

She died too soon. Mother, with you gone away,
the whole house is ruined.

415

*(Alcestis is carried into the house, followed
by children and servants.)*

Chorus

Admetus, you must stand up to misfortune now.
You are not the first, and not the last of humankind
to lose a good wife. Therefore, you must understand
death is an obligation claimed from all of us.

Admetus ·

I understand it. And this evil which has struck
was no surprise. I knew about it long ago,
and knowledge was hard. But now, since we must bury
our dead,

420

stay with me and stand by me, chant responsively
the hymn of the unsacrificed-to god below.

To all Thessalians over whom my rule extends
I ordain a public mourning for my wife, to be
observed with shaving of the head and with black robes.
The horses that you drive in chariots and those
you ride single shall have their manes cut short with steel,
and there shall be no sound of flutes within the city,
no sound of lyres, until twelve moons have filled and
gone;

425

430

A L C E S T I S

for I shall never bury any dearer dead
than she, nor any who loved me better. She deserves
my thanks. She died for me, which no one else would do.

(*Exit into the house.*)

Chorus

O daughter of Pelias 435
my wish for you is a happy life
in the sunless chambers of Hades.
Now let the dark-haired lord of Death himself, and the
old man,
who sits at the steering oar 440
and ferries the corpses,
know that you are the bravest of wives, by far,
ever conveyed across the tarn
of Acheron in the rowboat.

Much shall be sung of you 445
by the men of music to the seven-strung mountain
lyre-shell, and in poems that have no music,
in Sparta when the season turns and the month Carneian
comes back, and the moon
rides all the night; 450
in Athens also, the shining and rich.
Such is the theme of song you left
in death, for the poets.

Oh that it were in my power 455
and that I had strength to bring you
back to light from the dark of death
with oars on the sunken river.
For you, O dearest among women, you only 460
had the hard courage
to give your life for your husband's and save
him from death. May the dust lie light
upon you, my lady. And should he now take
a new wife to his bed, he will win my horror and hatred,
mine, and your children's hatred too. 465

E U R I P I D E S

His mother would not endure
to have her body hidden in the ground
for him, nor the aged father.
He was theirs, but they had not courage to save him.
Oh shame, for the gray was upon them. 470
But you, in the pride
of youth, died for him and left the daylight.
May it only be mine to win
such wedded love as hers from a wife; for this
is given seldom to mortals; but were my wife such, I
would have her
with me unhurt through her lifetime. 475

(Enter Heracles from the road, travel-stained.)

Heracles

My friends, people of Pherae and the villages
hereby, tell me, shall I find Admetus at home?

Chorus

Yes, Heracles, the son of Pheres is in the house.
But tell us, what is the errand that brings you here
to Thessaly and the city of Pherae once again? 480

Heracles

I have a piece of work to do for Eurystheus
of Tiryns.

Chorus

Where does it take you? On what far journey?

Heracles

To Thrace, to take home Diomedes' chariot.

Chorus

How can you? Do you know the man you are to meet?

Heracles

No. I have never been where the Bistones live. 485

Chorus

You cannot master his horses. Not without a fight.

Heracles

It is my work, and I cannot refuse.

Chorus

You must
kill him before you come back; or be killed and stay.

Heracles

If I must fight, it will not be for the first time.

Chorus

What good will it do you if you overpower their master? 490

Heracles

I will take the horses home to Tiryns and its king.

Chorus

It is not easy to put a bridle on their jaws.

Heracles

Easy enough, unless their nostrils are snorting fire.

Chorus

Not that, but they have teeth that tear a man apart.

Heracles

Oh no! Mountain beasts, not horses, feed like that. 495

Chorus

But you can see their mangers. They are caked with
blood.

Heracles

And the man who raises them? Whose son does he claim
he is?

Chorus

Ares'. And he is lord of the golden shield of Thrace.

Heracles

It sounds like my life and the kind of work I do.
 It is a hard and steep way always that I go, 500
 having to fight one after another all the sons
 the war god ever got him, with Lycaon first,
 again with Cycnus, and now here is a third fight
 that I must have with the master of these horses. So—
 I am Alcmene's son, and the man does not live 505
 who will see me break before my enemy's attack.

Chorus

Here is the monarch of our country coming
 from the house himself, Admetus.

(Enter Admetus.)

Admetus

Welcome and happiness
 to you, O scion of Perseus' blood and child of Zeus.

Heracles

Happiness to you likewise, lord of Thessaly, 510
 Admetus.

Admetus

I could wish it. I know you mean well.

Heracles

What is the matter? Why is there mourning and cut
 hair?

Admetus

There is one dead here whom I must bury today.

Heracles

Not one of your children! I pray God shield them from
 that.

Admetus

Not they. My children are well and living in their house. 515

Heracles

If it is your father who is gone, his time was ripe.

Admetus

No, he is still there, Heracles. My mother, too.

Heracles

Surely you have not lost your wife, Alcestis.

Admetus

Yes

and no. There are two ways that I could answer that.

Heracles

Did you say that she is dead or that she is still alive? 520

Admetus

She is, but she is gone away. It troubles me.

Heracles

I still do not know what you mean. You are being obscure.

Admetus

You know about her and what must happen, do you not?

Heracles

I know that she has undertaken to die for you.

Admetus

How can she really live, then, when she has promised that? 525

Heracles

Ah, do not mourn her before she dies. Wait for the time.

E U R I P I D E S

Admetus

The point of death is death, and the dead are lost and gone.

Heracles

Being and nonbeing are considered different things.

Admetus

That is your opinion, Heracles. It is not mine.

Heracles

Well, but whose is the mourning now? Is it in the family? 530

Admetus

A woman. We were speaking of a woman, were we not?

Heracles

Was she a blood relative or someone from outside?

Admetus

No relation by blood, but she meant much to us.

Heracles

How does it happen that she died here in your house?

Admetus

She lost her father and came here to live with us.

535

Heracles

I am sorry,

Admetus. I wish I had found you in a happier state.

Admetus

Why do you say that? What do you mean to do?

Heracles

I mean
to go on, and stay with another of my friends.

Admetus

No, my lord, no. The evil must not come to that.

Heracles

The friend who stays with friends in mourning is in the way.

540

Admetus

The dead are dead. Go on in.

Heracles

No. It is always wrong for guests to revel in a house where others mourn.

Admetus

There are separate guest chambers. We can take you there.

Heracles

Let me go, and I will thank you a thousand times.

Admetus

You shall not go to stay with any other man.

545

You there: open the guest rooms which are across the court

from the house, and tell the people who are there to provide

plenty to eat, and make sure that you close the doors

facing the inside court. It is not right for guests

to have their pleasures interrupted by sounds of grief.

550

(*Heracles is ushered inside.*)

Chorus

Admetus, are you crazy? What are you thinking of to entertain guests in a situation like this?

Admetus

And if I had driven from my city and my house

the guest and friend who came to me, would you have
approved

of me more? Wrong. My misery would still have been 555
as great, and I should be inhospitable too,
and there would be one more misfortune added to those
I have, if my house is called unfriendly to its friends.
For this man is my best friend, and he is my host
whenever I go to Argos, which is a thirsty place. 560

Chorus

Yes, but then why did you hide what is happening here
if this visitor is, as you say, your best friend?

Admetus

He would not have been willing to come inside my house
if he had known what trouble I was in. I know.

There are some will think I show no sense in doing this. 565
They will not like it. But my house does not know how
to push its friends away and not treat them as it should.

(*He goes inside.*)

Chorus

O liberal and forever free-handed house of this man,

the Pythian himself, lyric Apollo, 570

was pleased to live with you

and had patience upon your lands

to work as a shepherd,

and on the hill-folds and the slopes

piped to the pasturing of your flocks 575

in their season of mating.

And even dappled lynxes for delight in his melody
joined him as shepherds. From the cleft of Othrys de-
scended

a red troop of lions,

and there, Phoebus, to your lyre's strain

there danced the bright-coated

fawn, adventuring from the deep

580

585

A L C E S T I S

bearded pines, lightfooted for joy
in your song, in its kindness.

Therefore, your house is beyond
all others for wealth of flocks by the sweet waters
of Lake Boebias. For spread of cornland
and pasturing range its boundary stands 590
only there where the sun
stalls his horses in dark air by the Molossians.
Eastward he sways all to the harborless
Pelian coast on the Aegaeian main. 595

Now he has spread wide his doors
and taken the guest in, when his eyes were wet
and he wept still for a beloved wife who died
in the house so lately. The noble strain 600
comes out, in respect for others.
All that wisdom means is there in the noble. I stand
in awe, and good hope has come again to my heart
that for this godly man the end will be good. 605

*(Enter Admetus from the house, followed by
servants with a covered litter.)*

Admetus

Gentlemen of Pherae, I am grateful for your company.
My men are bearing to the burning place and grave
our dead, who now has all the state which is her due.
Will you then, as the custom is among us, say
farewell to the dead as she goes forth for the last time? 610

Chorus

Yes, but I see your father coming now. He walks
as old men do, and followers carry in their hands
gifts for your wife, to adorn her in the underworld.

(Enter Pheres, attended, from outside.)

Pheres

I have come to bear your sorrows with you, son. I know,

nobody will dispute it, you have lost a wife
both good and modest in her ways. Nevertheless,
you have to bear it, even though it is hard to bear.
Accept these gifts to deck her body, bury them
with her. Oh yes, she well deserves honor in death.
She died to save your life, my son. She would not let
me be a childless old man, would not let me waste
away in sorrowful age deprived of you. Thereby,
daring this generous action, she has made the life
of all women become a thing of better repute
than it was.

O you who saved him, you who raised us up 625
when we were fallen, farewell, even in Hades' house
may good befall you.

I say people ought to marry women like this. Otherwise, better not to marry at all.

Admetus

I never invited you to come and see her buried,
nor do I count your company as that of a friend. 630
She shall not wear anything that you bring her.
She needs nothing from you to be buried in. Your time
to share my sorrow was when I was about to die.
But you stood out of the way and let youth take my place
in death, though you were old. Will you cry for her now? 635
It cannot be that my body ever came from you,
nor did the woman who claims she bore me and is called
my mother give me birth. I was got from some slave
and surreptitiously put to your wife to nurse.
You show it. Your nature in the crisis has come out. 640
I do not count myself as any child of yours.
Oh, you outpass the cowardice of all the world,
you at your age, come to the very last step of life
and would not, dared not, die for your own child. Oh, no,
you let this woman, married into our family,
do it instead, and therefore it is right for me 645
to call her all the father and mother that I have.
And yet you two should honorably have striven for

A L C E S T I S

the right of dying for your child. The time of life
 you had left for your living was short, in any case,
 and she and I would still be living out our time
 and I should not be hurt and grieving over her.

650

And yet, all that a man could have to bless his life
 you have had. You had your youth in kingship. There
 was I

your son, ready to take it over, keep your house
 in order, so you had no childless death to fear,
 with the house left to be torn apart by other claims.
 You cannot justify your leaving me to death
 on grounds that I disrespected your old age. Always I
 showed all consideration. See what thanks I get
 from you and from the woman who gave me birth. Go on,
 get you other children, you cannot do it too soon,
 who will look after your old age, and lay you out
 when you are dead, and see you buried properly.

655

I will not do it. This hand will never bury you.
 I am dead as far as you are concerned, and if, because
 I found another savior, I still look on the sun,
 I count myself that person's child and fond support.
 It is meaningless, the way the old men pray for death
 and complain of age and the long time they have to live.
 Let death only come close, not one of them still wants
 to die. Their age is not a burden any more.

660

665

670

Chorus

Stop, stop. We have trouble enough already, child.
 You will exasperate your father with this talk.

Pheres

My son, what do you take me for that you address me
 like this? Some Lydian slave, some Phrygian that you
 bought?

675

I am a free Thessalian noble, nobly born
 from a Thessalian. Are you forgetting that? You go
 too far with your high-handedness. You volley brash
 words at me, and fail to hit me, and then run away.

680

E U R I P I D E S

I gave you life, and made you master of my house,
and raised you. I am not obliged to die for you.
I do not acknowledge any tradition among us
that fathers should die for their sons. That is not Greek.
Your natural right is to find your own happiness
or unhappiness. All you deserve from me, you have. 685
You are lord of many. I have wide estates of land
to leave you, just as my father left them to me.
What harm have I done you then? What am I taking
away

from you? Do not die for me, I will not die for you. 690

You like the sunlight. Don't you think your father does?
I count the time I have to spend down there as long,
and the time to live is little, but that little is sweet.

You fought shamelessly for a way to escape death,
and passed your proper moment, and are still alive 695
because you killed her. Then, you wretch, you dare to call
me coward, when you let your woman outdare you,
and die for her magnificent young man? I see.

You have found a clever scheme by which you *never* will
die.

You will always persuade the wife you have at the time 700
to die for you instead. And you, so low, then dare
blame your own people for not wanting to do this.

Silence. I tell you, as you cherish your own life,
all other people cherish theirs. And if you call
us names, you will be called names, and the names are
true. 705

Chorus

Too much evil has been said in this speech and in
that spoken before. Old sir, stop cursing your own son.

Admetus

No, speak, and I will speak too. If it hurts to hear
the truth, you should not have made a mistake with me.

Pherecides

I should have made a mistake if I had died for you. 710

A L C E S T I S

Admetus

Is it the same thing to die old and to die young?

Pheres

Yes. We have only one life and not two to live.

Admetus

I think you would like to live a longer time than Zeus.

Pheres

Cursing your parents, when they have done nothing to you?

Admetus

Yes, for I found you much in love with a long life.

715

Pheres

Who is it you are burying? Did not someone die?

Admetus

And that she died, you foul wretch, proves your cowardice.

Pheres

You cannot say that we were involved in her death.

Admetus

Ah.

I hope that some day you will stand in need of me.

720

Pheres

Go on, and court more women, so they all can die.

Admetus

Your fault. You were not willing to.

Pheres

No, I was not.

It is a sweet thing, this God's sunshine, sweet to see.

E U R I P I D E S

Admetus

That is an abject spirit, not a man's.

Pheres

You shall
not mock an old man while you carry out your dead.

Admetus

You will die in evil memory, when you do die.

725

Pheres

I do not care what they say of me when I am dead.

Admetus

How old age loses all the sense of shame.

Pheres

She was
not shameless, you found; she was only innocent.

Admetus

Get out of here now and let me bury my dead.

Pheres

I'll go. You murdered her, and you can bury her.
But you will have her brothers still to face. You'll pay,
for Acastus is no longer counted as a man
unless he sees you punished for his sister's blood.

730

Admetus

Go and be damned, you and that woman who lives with
you.

Grow old as you deserve, childless, although your son
still lives. You shall not come again under the same roof
with me. And if I had to proclaim by heralds that I
disowned my father's house, I should have so proclaimed.

735

(Pheres goes off.)

Now we, for we must bear the sorrow that is ours,
shall go, and lay her body on the burning place.

740

Chorus

Ah, cruel the price of your daring,
O generous one, O noble and brave,
farewell. May Hermes of the world below
and Hades welcome you. And if, even there,
the good fare best, may you have high honor
and sit by the bride of Hades.

745

(*The body is borne off, followed by Admetus, servants,
and Chorus. Thus the stage is empty. Then
enter, from the house, the servant who was
put in charge of Heracles.*)

Servant

I have known all sorts of foreigners who have come in
from all over the world here to Admetus' house,
and I have served them dinner, but I never yet
have had a guest as bad as this to entertain.

750

In the first place, he could see the master was in
mourning,

but inconsiderately came in anyway.

Then, he refused to understand the situation
and be content with anything we could provide,
but when we failed to bring him something, demanded it, 755
and took a cup with ivy on it in both hands
and drank the wine of our dark mother, straight, until
the flame of the wine went all through him, and heated
him,

and then he wreathed branches of myrtle on his head
and howled, off key. There were two kinds of music now
to hear, for while he sang and never gave a thought
to the sorrows of Admetus, we servants were mourning
our mistress; but we could not show before our guest
with our eyes wet. Admetus had forbidden that.

760

So now I have to entertain this guest inside,

765

this ruffian thief, this highwayman, whatever he is,
while she is gone away from the house, and I could not
say goodbye, stretch my hand out to her in my grief
for a mistress who was like a mother to all the house
and me. She gentled her husband's rages, saved us all
from trouble after trouble. Am I not then right
to hate this guest who has come here in our miseries?

770

(Enter Heracles from the house, drunk, but
not hopelessly so.)

Heracles

You there, with the sad and melancholy face, what is
the matter with you? The servant who looks after guests
should be polite and cheerful and not scowl at them.
But look at you. Here comes your master's dearest friend
to visit you, and you receive him with black looks
and frowns, all because of some trouble somewhere else.
Come here, I'll tell you something that will make you
wise.

775

Do you really know what things are like, the way they
are?

780

I don't think so. How could you? Well then, listen to me.
Death is an obligation which we all must pay.

There is not one man living who can truly say
if he will be alive or dead on the next day.

Fortune is dark; she moves, but we cannot see the way
nor can we pin her down by science and study her.

785

There, I have told you. Now you can understand. Go on,
enjoy yourself, drink, call the life you live today
your own, but only that, the rest belongs to chance.

Then, beyond all gods, pay your best attentions to
the Cyprian, man's sweetest. There's a god who's kind.

790

Let all this business go and do as I prescribe
for you, that is, if I seem to talk sense. Do I?

I think so. Well, then, get rid of this too-much grief,
put flowers on your head and drink with us, fight down
these present troubles; later, I know very well
that the wine splashing in the bowl will shake you loose

795

from these scowl-faced looks and the tension in your mind.

We are only human. Our thoughts should be human too, since, for these solemn people and these people who scowl,

800

the whole parcel of them, if I am any judge, life is not really life but a catastrophe.

Servant

I know all that. But we have troubles on our hands now, that make revelry and laughter out of place.

Heracles

The dead woman is out of the family. Do not mourn too hard. The master and the mistress are still alive.

805

Servant

What do you mean, alive? Do you not know what happened?

Heracles

Certainly, unless your master has lied to me.

Servant

He is too hospitable, too much.

Heracles

Should I not then have enjoyed myself, because some outside woman was dead?

810

Servant

She was an outsider indeed. That is too true.

Heracles

Has something happened that he did not tell me about?

Servant

Never mind. Go. Our masters' sorrows are our own.

Heracles

These can be no outsiders' troubles.

Servant

If they were,
I should not have minded seeing you enjoy yourself. 815

Heracles

Have I been scandalously misled by my own friends?

Servant

You came here when we were not prepared to take in
guests.

You see, we are in mourning. You can see our robes
of black, and how our hair is cut short.

Heracles

Who is dead?
The aged father? One of the children who is gone? 820

Servant

My lord, Admetus' wife is dead.

Heracles

What are you saying?
And all this time you were making me comfortable?

Servant

He could not bear to turn you from this house of his.

Heracles

My poor Admetus, what a helpmeet you have lost!

Servant

We are all dead and done for now, not only she. 825

Heracles

I really knew it when I saw the tears in his eyes,

his shorn hair and his face; but he persuaded me
with talk of burying someone who was not by blood
related. So, unwillingly, I came inside
and drank here in the house of this hospitable man
when he was in this trouble! Worse, I wreathed my head
with garlands, and drank freely. But you might have said
something about this great disaster in the house.
Now, where shall I find her? Where is the funeral being
held?

830

Servant

Go straight along the Larisa road, and when you clear
the city you will see the monument and the mound. 835

(*He goes into the house, leaving Heracles alone
on the stage.*)

Heracles

O heart of mine and hand of mine, who have endured
so much already, prove what kind of son it was
Alcmene, daughter of Electryon, bore to Zeus
in Tiryns. I must save this woman who has died
so lately, bring Alcestis back to live in this house,
and pay Admetus all the kindness that I owe.
I must go there and watch for Death of the black robes,
master of dead men, and I think I shall find him
drinking the blood of slaughtered beasts beside the grave. 840
Then, if I can break suddenly from my hiding place,
catch him, and hold him in the circle of these arms,
there is no way he will be able to break my hold
on his bruised ribs, until he gives the woman up
to me. But if I miss my quarry, if he does not come
to the clotted offering, I must go down, I must ask
the Maiden and the Master in the sunless homes
of those below; and I have confidence I shall bring
Alcestis back, and give her to the arms of my friend
who did not drive me off but took me into his house
and, though he staggered under the stroke of
circumstance, 850
855

hid it, for he was noble and respected me.
 Who in all Thessaly is a truer friend than this?
 Who in all Greece? Therefore, he must not ever say
 that, being noble, he befriended a worthless man. 860

(*He goes out. Presently Admetus comes on,
 followed by the Chorus.*)

Admetus

Hateful is this
 return, hateful the sight of this house
 widowed, empty. Where shall I go?
 Where shall I stay? What shall I say?
 How can I die?
 My mother bore me to a heavy fate. 865
 I envy the dead. I long for those
 who are gone, to live in their houses, with them.
 There is no pleasure in the sunshine
 nor the feel of the hard earth under my feet.
 Such was the hostage Death has taken
 from me, and given to Hades. 870

(*As they chant this, Admetus moans inarticulately.*)

Chorus

Go on, go on. Plunge in the deep of the house.
 What you have suffered is enough for tears.
 You have gone through pain, I know,
 but you do no good to the woman who lies
 below. Never again to look on the face
 of the wife you loved hurts you. 875

Admetus

You have opened the wound torn in my heart.
 What can be worse for a man than to lose
 a faithful wife. I envy those
 without wives, without children. I wish I had not
 ever married her, lived with her in this house.
 We have each one life. To grieve for this
 is burden enough. 880

A L C E S T I S

When we could live single all our days
 without children, it is not to be endured
 to see children sicken or married love
 despoiled by death.

885

(As before.)

Chorus

Chance comes. It is hard to wrestle against it.

There is no limit to set on your pain.

890

The weight is heavy. Yet still
 bear up. You are not the first man to lose
 his wife. Disaster appears, to crush
 one man now, but afterward another.

Admetus

How long my sorrows, the pain for my loves
 down under the earth.

895

Why did you stop me from throwing myself
 in the hollow cut of the grave, there to lie
 dead beside her, who was best on earth?

Then Hades would have held fast two lives,
 not one, and the truest of all, who crossed
 the lake of the dead together.

900

Chorus

There was a man
 of my people, who lost a boy
 any house would mourn for,
 the only child. But still
 he carried it well enough, though childless,
 and he stricken with age
 and the hair gray on him,
 well on through his lifetime.

905

910

Admetus

O builded house, how shall I enter you?
 How live, with this turn
 of my fortune? How different now and then.
 Then it was with Pelian pine torches,

915

with marriage songs, that I entered my house,
 with the hand of a sweet bride on my arm,
 with loud rout of revelers following
 to bless her who now is dead, and me,
 for our high birth, for nobilities 920
 from either side which were joined in us.
 Now the bridal chorus has changed for a dirge,
 and for white robes the costumed black
 goes with me inside
 to where her room stands deserted. 925

Chorus

Your luck had been
 good, so you were inexperienced when
 grief came. Still you saved
 your own life and substance.
 Your wife is dead, your love forsaken. 930
 What is new in this? Before
 now death has parted
 many from their wives.

Admetus

Friends, I believe my wife is happier than I
 although I know she does not seem to be. For her, 935
 there will be no more pain to touch her ever again.
 She has her glory and is free from much distress.
 But I, who should not be alive, who have passed by
 my moment, shall lead a sorry life. I see it now.
 How can I bear to go inside this house again? 940
 Whom shall I speak to, who will speak to me, to give
 me any pleasure in coming home? Where shall I turn?
 The desolation in my house will drive me out
 when I see my wife's bed empty, when I see the chairs
 she used to sit in, and all about the house the floor 945
 unwashed and dirty, while the children at my knees
 huddle and cry for their mother and the servants mourn
 their mistress and remember what the house has lost.
 So it will be at home, but if I go outside 950

A L C E S T I S

meeting my married friends in Thessaly, the sight
of their wives will drive me back, for I cannot endure
to look at my wife's agemates and the friends of her
youth.

And anyone who hates me will say this of me:
"Look at the man, disgracefully alive, who dared
not die, but like a coward gave his wife instead
and so escaped death. Do you call him a man at all?
He turns on his own parents, but he would not die
himself." Besides my other troubles, they will speak
about me thus. What have I gained by living, friends, 955
when reputation, life, and action all are bad? 960

Chorus

I myself, in the transports
of mystic verses, as in study
of history and science, have found
nothing so strong as Compulsion, 965
nor any means to combat her,
not in the Thracian books set down
in verse by the school of Orpheus,
not in all the remedies Phoebus has given the heirs
of Asclepius to fight the many afflictions of man. 970

She alone is a goddess
without altar or image to pray
before. She heeds no sacrifice. 975
Majesty, bear no harder
on me than you have in my life before!
All Zeus even ordains
only with you is accomplished.
By strength you fold and crumple the steel of the
Chalybes. 980
There is no pity in the sheer barrier of your will.

*(They turn and speak directly to Admetus, who
remains in the background.)*

E U R I P I D E S

Now she has caught your wife in the breakless grip of her hands.

Take it. You will never bring back, by crying, 985
the dead into the light again.

Even the sons of the gods fade
and go in death's shadow. 990

She was loved when she was with us.

She shall be loved still, now she is dead.

It was the best of all women to whom you were joined in
marriage.

The monument of your wife must not be counted among
the graves 995

of the dead, but it must be given its honors
as gods are, worship of wayfarers.

And as they turn the bend of the road
and see it, men shall say: 1000

"She died for the sake of her husband.

Now she is a blessed spirit.

Hail, majesty, be gracious to us." Thus will men speak in
her presence. 1005

But here is someone who looks like Alcmene's son,
Admetus. He seems on his way to visit you.

*(Heracles enters, leading a veiled woman by
the hand.)*

Heracles

A man, Admetus, should be allowed to speak his mind
to a friend, instead of keeping his complaints suppressed
inside him. Now, I thought I had the right to stand 1010
beside you and endure what you endured, so prove
my friendship. But you never told me that she, who lay
dead, was your wife, but entertained me in your house
as if your mourning were for some outsider's death.

And so I wreathed my head and poured libations out
to the gods, in your house, though your house had
suffered so. 1015

A L C E S T I S

This was wrong, wrong I tell you, to have treated me thus, though I have no wish to hurt you in your grief. Now, as for the matter of why I have come back again, I will tell you. Take this woman, keep her safe for me, until I have killed the master of the Bistones and come back, bringing with me the horses of Thrace. If I have bad luck—I hope not, I hope to come back home—I give her to the service of your house. It cost a struggle for her to come into my hands. You see, I came on people who were holding games for all comers, with prizes which an athlete might well spend an effort winning. 1020 1025

(Points to the woman.)

Here is the prize I won and bring you. For the winners in the minor events were given horses to take away, while those who won the heavier stuff, boxing and wrestling, got oxen, and a woman was thrown in with them. Since I happened to be there, it seemed wrong to let this splendid prize go by. As I said, the woman is for you to keep. She is not stolen. It cost me hard work to bring her here. Some day, perhaps, you will say I have done well. 1030 1035

Admetus

I did not mean to dishonor nor belittle you when I concealed the fate of my unhappy wife, but it would have added pain to pain already there if you had been driven to shelter with some other host. This sorrow is mine. It is enough for me to weep. As for the woman, if it can be done, my lord, I beg you, have some other Thessalian, who has not suffered as I have, keep her. You have many friends in Pherae. Do not bring my sorrows back to me. I would not have strength to see her in my house and keep my eyes dry. I am weak now. Do not add weakness 1040 1045

to my weakness. I have sorrow enough to weigh me down.
And where could a young woman live in this house? For
she is young, I can see it in her dress, her style.

1050

Am I to put her in the same quarters with the men?
And how, circulating among young men, shall she be kept
from harm? Not easy, Heracles, to hold in check
a young strong man. I am thinking of your interests.

Or shall I put her in my lost wife's chamber, keep
her there? How can I take her to Alcestis' bed?

1055

I fear blame from two quarters, from my countrymen
who might accuse me of betraying her who helped
me most, by running to the bed of another girl,
and from the dead herself. Her honor has its claim
on me. I must be very careful. You, lady,
whoever you are, I tell you that you have the form
of my Alcestis; all your body is like hers.

1060

Too much. Oh, for God's pity, take this woman away
out of my sight. I am beaten already, do not beat
me again. For as I look on her, I think I see
my wife. It churns my heart to tumult, and the tears
break streaming from my eyes. How much must I endure
the bitter taste of sorrow which is still so fresh?

1065

Chorus

I cannot put a good name to your fortune; yet
whoever you are, you must endure what the god gives.

1070

Heracles

I only wish that my strength had been great enough
for me to bring your wife back from the chambered deep
into the light. I would have done that grace for you.

Admetus

I know you would have wanted to. Why speak of it?
There is no way for the dead to come back to the light.

1075

Heracles

Then do not push your sorrow. Bear it as you must.

Heracles

Do you believe you help the dead by doing this?

Admetus

Wherever she may be, she deserves my honors still.

Heracles

Praiseworthy, yes, praiseworthy. And yet foolish, too.

Admetus

Call me so, then, but never call me a bridegroom.

Heracles

I admire you for your faith and love you bear your wife. 1095

Admetus

Let me die if I betray her, though she is gone.

Heracles

Well then,
receive this woman into your most generous house.

Admetus

Please, in the name of Zeus your father, no!

Heracles

And yet
you will be making a mistake if you do not;

Admetus

and eaten at the heart with anguish if I do. 1100

Heracles

Obey. The grace of this may come where you need grace.

Admetus

Ah.

I wish you had never won her in those games of yours.

A L C E S T I S

Heracles

Where I am winner, you are winner along with me.

Admetus

Honorably said. But let the woman go away.

Heracles

She will go, if she should. First look. See if she should. 1105

Admetus

She should, unless it means you will be angry with me.

Heracles

Something I know of makes me so insistent with you.

Admetus

So, have your way. But what you do does not please me.

Heracles

The time will come when you will thank me. Only obey.

Admetus (to attendants)

Escort her in, if she must be taken into this house. 1110

Heracles

I will not hand this lady over to attendants.

Admetus

You yourself lead her into the house then, if you wish.

Heracles

I will put her into your hands and into yours alone.

Admetus

I will not touch her. But she is free to come inside.

Heracles

No, I have faith in your right hand, and only yours. 1115

Admetus

My lord, you are forcing me to act against my wish.

Heracles

Be brave. Reach out your hand and take the stranger's.

Admetus

So.

Here is my hand; I feel like Perseus killing the gorgon.

Heracles

You have her?

Admetus

Yes, I have her.

Heracles

Keep her, then. Some day
you will say the son of Zeus came as your generous guest. 1120
But look at her. See if she does not seem most like
your wife. Your grief is over now. Your luck is back.

Admetus

Gods, what shall I think! Amazement beyond hope, as I
look on this woman, this wife. Is she really mine,
or some sweet mockery for God to stun me with? 1125

Heracles

Not so. This is your own wife you see. She is here.

Admetus

Be careful she is not some phantom from the depths.

Heracles

The guest and friend you took was no necromancer.

Admetus

Do I see my wife, whom I was laying in the grave?

A L C E S T I S

Heracles

Surely. But I do not wonder at your unbelief.

1130

Admetus

May I touch her, and speak to her, as my living wife?

Heracles

Speak to her. All that you desired is yours.

Admetus

Oh, eyes
and body of my dearest wife, I have you now
beyond all hope. I never thought to see you again.

Heracles

You have her. May no god hate you for your happiness. 1135

Admetus

O nobly sprung child of all-highest Zeus, may good
fortune go with you. May the father who gave you birth
keep you. You alone raised me up when I was down.
How did you bring her back from down there to the
light?

Heracles

I fought a certain deity who had charge of her.

1140

Admetus

Where do you say you fought this match with Death?

Heracles

Beside
the tomb itself. I sprang and caught him in my hands.

Admetus

But why is my wife standing here, and does not speak?

Heracles

You are not allowed to hear her speak to you until

her obligations to the gods who live below
 are washed away. Until the third morning comes. So now
 take her and lead her inside, and for the rest of time,
 Admetus, be just. Treat your guests as they deserve.
 And now goodbye. I have my work that I must do,
 and go to face the lordly son of Sthenelus. 1145
1150

Admetus

No, stay with us and be the guest of our hearth.

Heracles

There still
 will be a time for that, but I must press on now.

Admetus

Success go with you. May you find your way back here.

(*Heracles goes.*)

I proclaim to all the people of my tetrarchy
 that, for these blessed happenings, they shall set up
 dances, and the altars smoke with sacrifice offered. 1155
 For now we shall make our life again, and it will be
 a better one.

I was lucky. That I cannot deny.

(*He takes Alcestis by the hand and leads
 her inside the house.*)

Chorus (going)

Many are the forms of what is unknown.
 Much that the gods achieve is surprise.
 What we look for does not come to pass;
 God finds a way for what none foresaw.
 Such was the end of this story. 1160

T H E M E D E A

Translated and with an Introduction by

R E X W A R N E R

INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDEA

The Athenian audience who saw the first performance of Euripides' *Medea* at the state dramatic contest in 431 B.C. and who awarded the third prize to Euripides would have been familiar with the whole story of the chief characters, and we, twenty-three centuries later, are handicapped in our understanding of the play if we have not at least some knowledge of the same story.

The Athenians would have known Medea as a barbarian princess and as a sorceress, related to the gods. She came from the faraway land of Colchis at the eastern extremity of the Black Sea, where her father, King Aeetes, a sorcerer himself and the son of Helius, god of the sun, kept the Golden Fleece. Here Jason had come with the Argonauts, the first expedition of western Greeks against the eastern barbarians. Medea had fallen in love with him, and by her aid he was able to avoid the traps laid for him by Aeetes, to regain the Golden Fleece, and to escape, taking Medea with him. She, to assist the escape, had murdered her own brother, strewing the pieces of his body over the water so that her father's fleet, while collecting the fragments for burial, might lose time in the pursuit of the fugitives.

Medea and Jason then settled in Jason's hereditary kingdom of Iolcus, where Pelias, his uncle, still cheated him of his rights. Medea, hoping to do Jason a favor, persuaded the daughters of Pelias to attempt, under her guidance, a magic rejuvenation of their father. The old man was to be killed, cut in pieces, and then, with the aid of herbs and incantations, restored to his first youth. The unsuspecting daughters did as they were told, and Medea left them with their father's blood

E U R I P I D E S

upon their hands. However, the result of this crime was no advancement for Jason but rather exile for him, Medea, and their two children.

From Iolcus they came to Corinth, the scene of Euripides' play. Here Jason, either, as he says himself, wishing to strengthen his own economic position, or, as Medea thinks, because he was tired of his dangerous foreign wife, put her aside and married the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. It is at this point that the action of the play begins; but the Athenian audience would know well enough what the plot would be. They would know that Medea, in her jealous rage, would destroy both Creon and his daughter by means of a poisoned robe which clung to the flesh and burned it; that, despairing of her children's safety and wishing through them to injure Jason in every way, she would kill them with her own hands; and that, finally, by supernatural means, she would escape to their own city and take refuge with the old King Aegeus.

C H A R A C T E R S

*Medea, princess of Colchis and wife of
Jason, son of Aeson, king of Iolcus
Two children of Medea and Jason
Creon, king of Corinth
Aegeus, king of Athens
Nurse to Medea
Tutor to Medea's children
Messenger
Chorus of Corinthian Women*

THE MEDEA

SCENE: *In front of Medea's house in Corinth. Enter from the house Medea's nurse.*

Nurse

How I wish the Argo never had reached the land
Of Colchis, skimming through the blue Symplegades,
Nor ever had fallen in the glades of Pelion
The smitten fir-tree to furnish oars for the hands
Of heroes who in Pelias' name attempted
The Golden Fleece! For then my mistress Medea
Would not have sailed for the towers of the land of Iolcus,
Her heart on fire with passionate love for Jason;
Nor would she have persuaded the daughters of Pelias
To kill their father, and now be living here
In Corinth with her husband and children. She gave
Pleasure to the people of her land of exile,
And she herself helped Jason in every way.
This is indeed the greatest salvation of all—
For the wife not to stand apart from the husband.
But now there's hatred everywhere, Love is diseased.
For, deserting his own children and my mistress,
Jason has taken a royal wife to his bed,
The daughter of the ruler of this land, Creon.
And poor Medea is slighted, and cries aloud on the
Vows they made to each other, the right hands clasped
In eternal promise. She calls upon the gods to witness
What sort of return Jason has made to her love.
She lies without food and gives herself up to suffering,

5

10

15

20

E U R I P I D E S

Wasting away every moment of the day in tears. 25
So it has gone since she knew herself slighted by him.
Not stirring an eye, not moving her face from the ground,
No more than either a rock or surging sea water
She listens when she is given friendly advice.
Except that sometimes she twists back her white neck and 30
Moans to herself, calling out on her father's name,
And her land, and her home betrayed when she came
away with
A man who now is determined to dishonor her.
Poor creature, she has discovered by her sufferings
What it means to one not to have lost one's own country. 35
She has turned from the children and does not like to see
them.
I am afraid she may think of some dreadful thing,
For her heart is violent. She will never put up with
The treatment she is getting. I know and fear her
Lest she may sharpen a sword and thrust to the heart, 40
Stealing into the palace where the bed is made,
Or even kill the king and the new-wedded groom,
And thus bring a greater misfortune on herself.
She's a strange woman. I know it won't be easy
To make an enemy of her and come off best. 45
But here the children come. They have finished playing.
They have no thought at all of their mother's trouble.
Indeed it is not usual for the young to grieve.

(Enter from the right the slave who is the tutor
to Medea's two small children. The
children follow him.)

Tutor

You old retainer of my mistress' household,
Why are you standing here all alone in front of the
Gates and moaning to yourself over your misfortune? 50
Medea could not wish you to leave her alone.

Nurse

Old man, and guardian of the children of Jason,

If one is a good servant, it's a terrible thing
 When one's master's luck is out; it goes to one's heart. 55
 So I myself have got into such a state of grief
 That a longing stole over me to come outside here
 And tell the earth and air of my mistress' sorrows.

Tutor

Has the poor lady not yet given up her crying?

Nurse

Given up? She's at the start, not halfway through her
 tears. 60

Tutor

Poor fool—if I may call my mistress such a name—
 How ignorant she is of trouble more to come.

Nurse

What do you mean, old man? You needn't fear to speak.

Tutor

Nothing. I take back the words which I used just now.

Nurse

Don't, by your beard, hide this from me, your fellow-servant. 65

If need be, I'll keep quiet about what you tell me.

Tutor

I heard a person saying, while I myself seemed
 Not to be paying attention, when I was at the place
 Where the old draught-players sit, by the holy fountain,
 That Creon, ruler of the land, intends to drive
 These children and their mother in exile from Corinth.
 But whether what he said is really true or not
 I do not know. I pray that it may not be true. 70

Nurse

And will Jason put up with it that his children
Should suffer so, though he's no friend to their mother?

75

Tutor

Old ties give place to new ones. As for Jason, he
No longer has a feeling for this house of ours.

Nurse

It's black indeed for us, when we add new to old
Sorrows before even the present sky has cleared.

Tutor

But you be silent, and keep all this to yourself.
It is not the right time to tell our mistress of it.

80

Nurse

Do you hear, children, what a father he is to you?
I wish he were dead—but no, he is still my master.
Yet certainly he has proved unkind to his dear ones.

Tutor

What's strange in that? Have you only just discovered
That everyone loves himself more than his neighbor?
Some have good reason, others get something out of it.
So Jason neglects his children for the new bride.

85

Nurse

Go indoors, children. That will be the best thing.
And you, keep them to themselves as much as possible.
Don't bring them near their mother in her angry mood.
For I've seen her already blazing her eyes at them
As though she meant some mischief and I am sure that
She'll not stop raging until she has struck at someone.
May it be an enemy and not a friend she hurts!

90

95

THE MEDEA

(*Medea is heard inside the house.*)

Medea

Ah, wretch! Ah, lost in my sufferings,
I wish, I wish I might die.

Nurse

What did I say, dear children? Your mother
Frets her heart and frets it to anger.

Run away quickly into the house,

100

And keep well out of her sight.

Don't go anywhere near, but be careful
Of the wildness and bitter nature

Of that proud mind.

Go now! Run quickly indoors.

105

It is clear that she soon will put lightning
In that cloud of her cries that is rising

With a passion increasing. O, what will she do,
Proud-hearted and not to be checked on her course,

A soul bitten into with wrong?

110

(*The Tutor takes the children into the house.*) 400

Medea

Ah, I have suffered

What should be wept for bitterly. I hate you

Children of a hateful mother. I curse you

And your father. Let the whole house crash.

Nurse

Ah, I pity you, you poor creature.

115

How can your children share in their father's

Wickedness? Why do you hate them? Oh children,

How much I fear that something may happen!

Great people's tempers are terrible, always

Having their own way, seldom checked,

120

Dangerous they shift from mood to mood.

How much better to have been accustomed

To live on equal terms with one's neighbors.

I would like to be safe and grow old in a

125

E U R I P I D E S

Humble way. What is moderate sounds best,
Also in practice is best for everyone.
Greatness brings no profit to people.
God indeed, when in anger, brings
Greater ruin to great men's houses.

130

(Enter, on the right, a Chorus of Corinthian women.
They have come to inquire about Medea
and to attempt to console her.)

Chorus

I heard the voice, I heard the cry
Of Colchis' wretched daughter.
Tell me, mother, is she not yet
At rest? Within the double gates
Of the court I heard her cry. I am sorry
For the sorrow of this home. O, say, what has happened?

135

Nurse

There is no home. It's over and done with.
Her husband holds fast to his royal wedding,
While she, my mistress, cries out her eyes
There in her room, and takes no warmth from
Any word of any friend.

140

Medea

Oh, I wish
That lightning from heaven would split my head open.
Oh, what use have I now for life?
I would find my release in death
And leave hateful existence behind me.

145

Chorus

O God and Earth and Heaven!
Did you hear what a cry was that
Which the sad wife sings?
Poor foolish one, why should you long
For that appalling rest?
The final end of death comes fast.

150

THE MEDEA

No need to pray for that.
Suppose your man gives honor
To another woman's bed.
It often happens. Don't be hurt.
God will be your friend in this.
You must not waste away
Grieving too much for him who shared your bed.

155

Medea

Great Themis, lady Artemis, behold
The things I suffer, though I made him promise,
My hateful husband. I pray that I may see him,
Him and his bride and all their palace shattered
For the wrong they dare to do me without cause.
Oh, my father! Oh, my country! In what dishonor
I left you, killing my own brother for it.

160

165

Nurse

Do you hear what she says, and how she cries
On Themis, the goddess of Promises, and on Zeus,
Whom we believe to be the Keeper of Oaths?
Of this I am sure, that no small thing
Will appease my mistress' anger.

170

Chorus

Will she come into our presence?
Will she listen when we are speaking
To the words we say?
I wish she might relax her rage
And temper of her heart.
My willingness to help will never
Be wanting to my friends.
But go inside and bring her
Out of the house to us,
And speak kindly to her: hurry,
Before she wrongs her own.
This passion of hers moves to something great.

175

180

EURIPIDES

Nurse

I will, but I doubt if I'll manage
To win my mistress over. 185
But still I'll attempt it to please you.
Such a look she will flash on her servants
If any comes near with a message,
Like a lioness guarding her cubs.
It is right, I think, to consider 190
Both stupid and lacking in foresight
Those poets of old who wrote songs
For revels and dinners and banquets,
Pleasant sounds for men living at ease;
But none of them all has discovered
How to put to an end with their singing 195
Or musical instruments grief,
Bitter grief, from which death and disaster
Cheat the hopes of a house. Yet how good
If music could cure men of this! But why raise
To no purpose the voice at a banquet? For *there* is
Already abundance of pleasure for men
With a joy of its own. 200

(*The Nurse goes into the house.*)

Chorus

I heard a shriek that is laden with sorrow.
Shrilling out her hard grief she cries out 205
Upon him who betrayed both her bed and her marriage.
Wronged, she calls on the gods,
On the justice of Zeus, the oath sworn,
Which brought her away
To the opposite shore of the Greeks
Through the gloomy salt straits to the gateway 210
Of the salty unlimited sea.

(*Medea, attended by servants, comes out of the house.*)

Medea

Women of Corinth, I have come outside to you
Lest you should be indignant with me; for I know 215

THE MEDEA

That many people are overproud, some when alone,
And others when in company. And those who live
Quietly, as I do, get a bad reputation.

For a just judgment is not evident in the eyes
When a man at first sight hates another, before
Learning his character, being in no way injured;
And a foreigner especially must adapt himself.

220

I'd not approve of even a fellow-countryman
Who by pride and want of manners offends his neighbors.

But on me this thing has fallen so unexpectedly, 225
It has broken my heart. I am finished. I let go
All my life's joy. My friends, I only want to die.

It was everything to me to think well of one man,
And he, my own husband, has turned out wholly vile.
Of all things which are living and can form a judgment 230
We women are the most unfortunate creatures.

Firstly, with an excess of wealth it is required
For us to buy a husband and take for our bodies
A master; for not to take one is even worse.

And now the question is serious whether we take 235
A good or bad one; for there is no easy escape
For a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage.

She arrives among new modes of behavior and manners,
And needs prophetic power, unless she has learned at
home,

How best to manage him who shares the bed with her. 240
And if we work out all this well and carefully,
And the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke,
Then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die.

A man, when he's tired of the company in his home,
Goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom 245
And turns to a friend or companion of his own age.
But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone.

What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time
Living at home, while they do the fighting in war.

How wrong they are! I would very much rather stand 250
Three times in the front of battle than bear one child.
Yet what applies to me does not apply to you.

EURIPIDES

You have a country. Your family home is here.
You enjoy life and the company of your friends.
But I am deserted, a refugee, thought nothing of
By my husband—something he won in a foreign land. 255
I have no mother or brother, nor any relation
With whom I can take refuge in this sea of woe.
This much then is the service I would beg from you:
If I can find the means or devise any scheme
To pay my husband back for what he has done to me—
Him and his father-in-law and the girl who married
him— 260
Just to keep silent. For in other ways a woman
Is full of fear, defenseless, dreads the sight of cold
Steel; but, when once she is wronged in the matter of
love, 265
No other soul can hold so many thoughts of blood.

Chorus

This I will promise. You are in the right, Medea,
In paying your husband back. I am not surprised at you
For being sad.

But look! I see our King Creon
Approaching. He will tell us of some new plan. 270

(Enter, from the right, Creon, with attendants.)

Creon

You, with that angry look, so set against your husband,
Medea, I order you to leave my territories
An exile, and take along with you your two children,
And not to waste time doing it. It is my decree,
And I will see it done. I will not return home
Until you are cast from the boundaries of my land. 275

Medea

Oh, this is the end for me. I am utterly lost.
Now I am in the full force of the storm of hate
And have no harbor from ruin to reach easily.

THE MEDEA

Yet still, in spite of it all, I'll ask the question:
What is your reason, Creon, for banishing me?

280

Creon

I am afraid of you—why should I dissemble it?—
Afraid that you may injure my daughter mortally.
Many things accumulate to support my feeling.
You are a clever woman, versed in evil arts, 285
And are angry at having lost your husband's love.
I hear that you are threatening, so they tell me,
To do something against my daughter and Jason
And me, too. I shall take my precautions first.
I tell you, I prefer to earn your hatred now
Than to be soft-hearted and afterward regret it. 290

Medea

This is not the first time, Creon. Often previously
Through being considered clever I have suffered much.
A person of sense ought never to have his children
Brought up to be more clever than the average. 295
For, apart from cleverness bringing them no profit,
It will make them objects of envy and ill-will.
If you put new ideas before the eyes of fools
They'll think you foolish and worthless into the bargain;
And if you are thought superior to those who have
Some reputation for learning, you will become hated. 300
I have some knowledge myself of how this happens;
For being clever, I find that some will envy me,
Others object to me. Yet all my cleverness
Is not so much. 305

Well, then, are you frightened, Creon,
That I should harm you? There is no need. It is not
My way to transgress the authority of a king.
How have you injured me? You gave your daughter away
To the man you wanted. Oh, certainly I hate 310
My husband, but you, I think, have acted wisely;
Nor do I grudge it you that your affairs go well.
May the marriage be a lucky one! Only let me

Live in this land. For even though I have been wronged,
I will not raise my voice, but submit to my betters.

315

Creon

What you say sounds gentle enough. Still in my heart
I greatly dread that you are plotting some evil,
And therefore I trust you even less than before.
A sharp-tempered woman, or, for that matter, a man,
Is easier to deal with than the clever type
Who holds her tongue. No. You must go. No need for
more

320

Speeches. The thing is fixed. By no manner of means
Shall you, an enemy of mine, stay in my country.

Medea

I beg you. By your knees, by your new-wedded girl.

Creon

Your words are wasted. You will never persuade me.

325

Medea

Will you drive me out, and give no heed to my prayers?

Creon

I will, for I love my family more than you.

Medea

O my country! How bitterly now I remember you!

Creon

I love my country too—next after my children.

Medea

Oh what an evil to men is passionate love!

330

Creon

That would depend on the luck that goes along with it.

Medea

O God, do not forget who is the cause of this!

THE MEDEA

Creon

Go. It is no use. Spare me the pain of forcing you.

Medea

I'm spared no pain. I lack no pain to be spared me.

Creon

Then you'll be removed by force by one of my men.

335

Medea

No, Creon, not that! But do listen, I beg you.

Creon

Woman, you seem to want to create a disturbance.

Medea

I will go into exile. *This* is not what I beg for.

Creon

Why then this violence and clinging to my hand?

Medea

Allow me to remain here just for this one day,
So I may consider where to live in my exile,
And look for support for my children, since their father
Chooses to make no kind of provision for them.

Have pity on them! You have children of your own.
It is natural for you to look kindly on them.
For myself I do not mind if I go into exile.
It is the children being in trouble that I mind.

345

Creon

There is nothing tyrannical about my nature,
And by showing mercy I have often been the loser.
Even now I know that I am making a mistake.
All the same you shall have your will. But this I tell you,
That if the light of heaven tomorrow shall see you,

350

You and your children in the confines of my land,
 You die. This word I have spoken is firmly fixed.
 But now, if you must stay, stay for this day alone.
 For in it you can do none of the things I fear.

355

(Exit Creon with his attendants.)

Chorus

Oh, unfortunate one! Oh, cruel!
 Where will you turn? Who will help you?
 What house or what land to preserve you
 From ill can you find?
 Medea, a god has thrown suffering
 Upon you in waves of despair.

360

Medea

Things have gone badly every way. No doubt of that
 But not these things this far, and don't imagine so.
 There are still trials to come for the new-wedded pair,
 And for their relations pain that will mean something.
 Do you think that I would ever have fawned on that man
 Unless I had some end to gain or profit in it?
 I would not even have spoken or touched him with my
 hands.

365

But he has got to such a pitch of foolishness
 That, though he could have made nothing of all my plans
 By exiling me, he has given me this one day
 To stay here, and in this I will make dead bodies
 Of three of my enemies—father, the girl, and my
 husband.

370

I have many ways of death which I might suit to them,
 And do not know, friends, which one to take in hand;
 Whether to set fire underneath their bridal mansion,
 Or sharpen a sword and thrust it to the heart,
 Stealing into the palace where the bed is made.
 There is just one obstacle to this. If I am caught
 Breaking into the house and scheming against it,
 I shall die, and give my enemies cause for laughter.
 It is best to go by the straight road, the one in which

375

T H E M E D E A

I am most skilled, and make away with them by poison. 385
 So be it then.

And now suppose them dead. What town will receive
 me?

What friend will offer me a refuge in his land,
 Or the guaranty of his house and save my own life?
 There is none. So I must wait a little time yet,
 And if some sure defense should then appear for me, 390
 In craft and silence I will set about this murder.

But if my fate should drive me on without help,
 Even though death is certain, I will take the sword
 Myself and kill, and steadfastly advance to crime.

It shall not be—I swear it by her, my mistress, 395
 Whom most I honor and have chosen as partner,
 Hecate, who dwells in the recesses of my hearth—
 That any man shall be glad to have injured me.

Bitter I will make their marriage for them and mournful,
 Bitter the alliance and the driving me out of the land. 400

Ah, come, Medea, in your plotting and scheming
 Leave nothing untried of all those things which you
 know.

Go forward to the dreadful act. The test has come
 For resolution. You see how you are treated. Never
 Shall you be mocked by Jason's Corinthian wedding, 405
 Whose father was noble, whose grandfather Helius.
 You have the skill. What is more, you were born a
 woman,

And women, though most helpless in doing good deeds,
 Are of every evil the cleverest of contrivers.

Chorus

Flow backward to your sources, sacred rivers, 410
 And let the world's great order be reversed.
 It is the thoughts of *men* that are deceitful,
Their pledges that are loose. 415

Story shall now turn my condition to a fair one,
 Women are paid their due.

No more shall evil-sounding fame be theirs. 420

E U R I P I D E S

Cease now, you muses of the ancient singers,
To tell the tale of my unfaithfulness;
For not on us did Phoebus, lord of music,
Bestow the lyre's divine 425
Power, for otherwise I should have sung an answer
To the other sex. Long time
Has much to tell of us, and much of them. 430

You sailed away from your father's home,
With a heart on fire you passed
The double rocks of the sea.
And now in a foreign country 435
You have lost your rest in a widowed bed,
And are driven forth, a refugee
In dishonor from the land.

Good faith has gone, and no more remains
In great Greece a sense of shame. 440
It has flown away to the sky.
No father's house for a haven
Is at hand for you now, and another queen
Of your bed has dispossessed you and
Is mistress of your home. 445

(Enter Jason, with attendants.)

Jason

This is not the first occasion that I have noticed
How hopeless it is to deal with a stubborn temper.
For, with reasonable submission to our ruler's will,
You might have lived in this land and kept your home.
As it is you are going to be exiled for your loose speaking. 450
Not that I mind myself. You are free to continue
Telling everyone that Jason is a worthless man.
But as to your talk about the king, consider
Yourself most lucky that exile is your punishment.
I, for my part, have always tried to calm down 455
The anger of the king, and wished you to remain.

THE MEDEA

But you will not give up your folly, continually
 Speaking ill of him, and so you are going to be banished.
 All the same, and in spite of your conduct, I'll not desert
 My friends, but have come to make some provision for
 you,

460

So that you and the children may not be penniless
 Or in need of anything in exile. Certainly
 Exile brings many troubles with it. And even
 If you hate me, I cannot think badly of you.

Medea

O coward in every way—that is what I call you, 465
 With bitterest reproach for your lack of manliness,

You have come, you, my worst enemy, have come to me!
 It is not an example of overconfidence

470

Or of boldness thus to look your friends in the face,

Friends you have injured—no, it is the worst of all
 Human diseases, shamelessness. But you did well

To come, for I can speak ill of you and lighten
 My heart, and you will suffer while you are listening.

And first I will begin from what happened first. 475
 I saved your life, and every Greek knows I saved it,

Who was a shipmate of yours aboard the Argo,
 When you were sent to control the bulls that breathed

fire

And yoke them, and when you would sow that deadly
 field.

Also that snake, who encircled with his many folds 480
 The Golden Fleece and guarded it and never slept,

I killed, and so gave you the safety of the light.

And I myself betrayed my father and my home,
 And came with you to Pelias' land of Iolcus.

And then, showing more willingness to help than wisdom, 485
 I killed him, Pelias, with a most dreadful death

At his own daughters' hands, and took away your fear.

This is how I behaved to you, you wretched man,
 And you forsook me, took another bride to bed,

Though you had children; for, if that had not been,

490

You would have had an excuse for another wedding.
 Faith in your word has gone. Indeed, I cannot tell
 Whether you think the gods whose names you swore by
 then

Have ceased to rule and that new standards are set up,
 Since you must know you have broken your word to me.
 O my right hand, and the knees which you often clasped
 In supplication, how senselessly I am treated
 By this bad man, and how my hopes have missed their
 mark!

Come, I will share my thoughts as though you were a
 friend—

You! Can I think that you would ever treat me well? 500

But I will do it, and these questions will make you
 Appear the baser. Where am I to go? To my father's?
 Him I betrayed and his land when I came with you.
 To Pelias' wretched daughters? What a fine welcome
 They would prepare for me who murdered their father!

For this is my position—hated by my friends 505

At home, I have, in kindness to you, made enemies
 Of others whom there was no need to have injured.
 And how happy among Greek women you have made me

On your side for all this! A distinguished husband
 I have—for breaking promises. When in misery 510

I am cast out of the land and go into exile,
 Quite without friends and all alone with my children,
 That will be a fine shame for the new-wedded groom,
 For his children to wander as beggars and she who saved
 him.

O God, you have given to mortals a sure method
 Of telling the gold that is pure from the counterfeit;
 Why is there no mark engraved upon men's bodies,
 By which we could know the true ones from the false
 ones?

Chorus

It is a strange form of anger, difficult to cure,
 When two friends turn upon each other in hatred.)

495

500

505

510

515

520

THE MEDEA

Jason

As for me, it seems I must be no bad speaker.
 But, like a man who has a good grip of the tiller,
 Reef up his sail, and so run away from under
 This mouthing tempest, woman, of your bitter tongue. 525
 Since you insist on building up your kindness to me,
 My view is that Cypris was alone responsible
 Of men and gods for the preserving of my life.
 You are clever enough—but really I need not enter
 Into the story of how it was love's inescapable
 Power that compelled you to keep my person safe. 530
 On this I will not go into too much detail.
 In so far as you helped me, you did well enough.
 But on this question of saving me, I can prove
 You have certainly got from me more than you gave. 535
 Firstly, instead of living among barbarians,
 You inhabit a Greek land and understand our ways,
 How to live by law instead of the sweet will of force.
 And all the Greeks considered you a clever woman.
 You were honored for it; while, if you were living at 540
 The ends of the earth, nobody would have heard of you.
 For my part, rather than stores of gold in my house
 Or power to sing even sweeter songs than Orpheus,
 I'd choose the fate that made me a distinguished man.
 There is my reply to your story of my labors. 545
 Remember it was you who started the argument.
 Next for your attack on my wedding with the princess:
 Here I will prove that, first, it was a clever move,
 Secondly, a wise one, and, finally, that I made it
 In your best interests and the children's. Please keep 550
 calm.
 When I arrived here from the land of Iolcus,
 Involved, as I was, in every kind of difficulty,
 What luckier chance could I have come across than this,
 An exile to marry the daughter of the king?
 It was not—the point that seems to upset you—that I 555
 Grew tired of your bed and felt the need of a new bride;
 Nor with any wish to outdo your number of children.

We have enough already. I am quite content.
 But—this was the main reason—that we might live well,
 And not be short of anything. I know that all
 A man's friends leave him stone-cold if he becomes poor. 560
 Also that I might bring my children up worthily
 Of my position, and, by producing more of them
 To be brothers of yours, we would draw the families
 Together and all be happy. You need no children. 565
 And it pays me to do good to those I have now
 By having others. Do you think this a bad plan?
 You wouldn't if the love question hadn't upset you.
 But you women have got into such a state of mind
 That, if your life at night is good, you think you have 570
 Everything; but, if in that quarter things go wrong,
 You will consider your best and truest interests
 Most hateful. It would have been better far for men
 To have got their children in some other way, and women
 Not to have existed. Then life would have been good. 575

Chorus

Jason, though you have made this speech of yours look
 well,
 Still I think, even though others do not agree,
 You have betrayed your wife and are acting badly.

Medea

Surely in many ways I hold different views
 From others, for I think that the plausible speaker 580
 Who is a villain deserves the greatest punishment.
 Confident in his tongue's power to adorn evil,
 He stops at nothing. Yet he is not really wise.
 As in your case. There is no need to put on the airs
 Of a clever speaker, for one word will lay you flat. 585
 If you were not a coward, you would not have married
 Behind my back, but discussed it with me first.

Jason

And you, no doubt, would have furthered the proposal,

THE MEDEA

If I had told you of it, you who even now
Are incapable of controlling your bitter temper. 590

Medea

It was not that. No, you thought it was not respectable
As you got on in years to have a foreign wife.

Jason

Make sure of this: it was not because of a woman
I made the royal alliance in which I now live,
But, as I said before, I wished to preserve you
And breed a royal progeny to be brothers 595
To the children I have now, a sure defense to us.

Medea

Let me have no happy fortune that brings pain with it,
Or prosperity which is upsetting to the mind!

Jason

Change your ideas of what you want, and show more
sense.
Do not consider painful what is good for you, 600
Nor, when you are lucky, think yourself unfortunate.

Medea

You can insult me. You have somewhere to turn to.
But I shall go from this land into exile, friendless.

Jason

It was what you chose yourself. Don't blame others for it. 605

Medea

And how did I choose it? Did I betray my husband?

Jason

You called down wicked curses on the king's family.

Medea

A curse, that is what I am become to your house too.

Jason

I do not propose to go into all the rest of it;
 But, if you wish for the children or for yourself
 In exile to have some of my money to help you,
 Say so, for I am prepared to give with open hand,
 Or to provide you with introductions to my friends
 Who will treat you well. You are a fool if you do not
 Accept this. Cease your anger and you will profit.

610

615

Medea

I shall never accept the favors of friends of yours,
 Nor take a thing from you, so you need not offer it.
 There is no benefit in the gifts of a bad man.

Jason

Then, in any case, I call the gods to witness that
 I wish to help you and the children in every way,
 But you refuse what is good for you. Obstinate
 You push away your friends. You are sure to suffer for it.

620

Medea

Go! No doubt you hanker for your virginal bride,
 And are guilty of lingering too long out of her house.
 Enjoy your wedding. But perhaps—with the help of
 God—
 You will make the kind of marriage that you will regret.

625

(*Jason goes out with his attendants.*)

Chorus

When love is in excess
 It brings a man no honor
 Nor any worthiness.
 But if in moderation Cypris comes,
 There is no other power at all so gracious.
 O goddess, never on me let loose the unerring
 Shaft of your bow in the poison of desire.

630

Let my heart be wise.
 It is the gods' best gift.

635

THE MEDEA

On me let mighty Cypris
Inflict no wordy wars or restless anger
To urge my passion to a different love.
But with discernment may she guide women's weddings, 640
Honoring most what is peaceful in the bed.

O country and home,
Never, never may I be without you,
Living the hopeless life, 645
Hard to pass through and painful,
Most pitiable of all.
Let death first lay me low and death
Free me from this daylight.
There is no sorrow above
The loss of a native land. 650

I have seen it myself,
Do not tell of a second-hand story
Neither city nor friend 655
Pitied you when you suffered
The worst of sufferings.
O let him die ungraced whose heart
Will not reward his friends,
Who cannot open an honest mind
No friend will he be of mine. 660

(Enter Aegeus, *king of Athens, an old friend of Medea.*)

Aegeus
Medea, greeting! This is the best introduction
Of which men know for conversation between friends.

Medea
Greeting to you too, Aegeus, son of King Pandion. 665
Where have you come from to visit this country's soil?

Aegeus
I have just left the ancient oracle of Phoebus.

E U R I P I D E S

Medea

And why did you go to earth's prophetic center?

Aegeus

I went to inquire how children might be born to me.

Medea

Is it so? Your life still up to this point is childless? 670

Aegeus

Yes. By the fate of some power we have no children.

Medea

Have you a wife, or is there none to share your bed?

Aegeus

There is. Yes, I am joined to my wife in marriage.

Medea

And what did Phoebus say to you about children?

Aegeus

Words too wise for a mere man to guess their meaning. 675

Medea

It is proper for me to be told the god's reply?

Aegeus

It is. For sure what is needed is cleverness.

Medea

Then what was his message? Tell me, if I may hear.

Aegeus

I am not to loosen the hanging foot of the wine-skin . . .

Medea

Until you have done something, or reached some country? 680

T H E M E D E A

Aegeus

Until I return again to my hearth and house.

Medea

And for what purpose have you journeyed to this land?

Aegeus

There is a man called Pittheus, king of Troezen.

Medea

A son of Pelops, they say, a most righteous man.

Aegeus

With him I wish to discuss the reply of the god.

685

Medea

Yes. He is wise and experienced in such matters.

Aegeus

And to me also the dearest of all my spear-friends.

Medea

Well, I hope you have good luck, and achieve your will.

Aegeus

But why this downcast eye of yours, and this pale cheek?

Medea

O Aegeus, my husband has been the worst of all to me.

690

Aegeus

What do you mean? Say clearly what has caused this grief.

Medea

Jason wrongs me, though I have never injured him.

Aegeus

What has he done? Tell me about it in clearer words.

Medea

He has taken a wife to his house, supplanting me.

Aegeus

Surely he would not dare to do a thing like that.

695

Medea

Be sure he has. Once dear, I now am slighted by him.

Aegeus

Did he fall in love? Or is he tired of your love?

Medea

He was greatly in love, this traitor to his friends.

Aegeus

Then let him go, if, as you say, he is so bad.

Medea

A passionate love—for an alliance with the king.

700

Aegeus

And who gave him his wife? Tell me the rest of it.

Medea

It was Creon, he who rules this land of Corinth.

Aegeus

Indeed, Medea, your grief was understandable.

Medea

I am ruined. And there is more to come: I am banished.

Aegeus

Banished? By whom? Here you tell me of a new wrong.

705

Medea

Creon drives me an exile from the land of Corinth.

THE MEDEA

Aegeus

Does Jason consent? I cannot approve of this.

Medea

He pretends not to, but he will put up with it.
Ah, Aegeus, I beg and beseech you, by your beard
And by your knees I am making myself your suppliant, 710
Have pity on me, have pity on your poor friend,
And do not let me go into exile desolate,
But receive me in your land and at your very hearth.
So may your love, with God's help, lead to the bearing
Of children, and so may you yourself die happy. 715
You do not know what a chance you have come on here.
I will end your childlessness, and I will make you able
To beget children. The drugs I know can do this.

Aegeus

For many reasons, woman, I am anxious to do
This favor for you. First, for the sake of the gods, 720
And then for the birth of children which you promise,
For in that respect I am entirely at my wits' end.
But this is my position: if you reach my land,
I, being in my rights, will try to befriend you.
But this much I must warn you of beforehand: 725
I shall not agree to take you out of this country;
But if you by yourself can reach my house, then you
Shall stay there safely. To none will I give you up
But from this land you must make your escape yourself,
For I do not wish to incur blame from my friends. 730

Medea

It shall be so. But, if I might have a pledge from you
For this, then I would have from you all I desire.

Aegeus

Do you not trust me? What is it rankles with you?

Medea

I trust you, yes. But the house of Pelias hates me,

And so does Creon. If you are bound by this oath,
 When they try to drag me from your land, you will not
 Abandon me; but if our pact is only words,
 With no oath to the gods, you will be lightly armed,
 Unable to resist their summons. I am weak,
 While they have wealth to help them and a royal house.

735

Aegeus
 You show much foresight for such negotiations.
 Well, if you will have it so, I will not refuse.
 For, both on my side this will be the safest way
 To have some excuse to put forward to your enemies,
 And for you it is more certain. You may name the gods.

740

Medea
 Swear by the plain of Earth, and Helius, father
 Of my father, and name together all the gods. . .

Aegeus
 That I will act or not act in what way? Speak.

Medea
 That you yourself will never cast me from your land,
 Nor, if any of my enemies should demand me,
 Will you, in your life, willingly hand me over.

750

Aegeus
 I swear by the Earth, by the holy light of Helius,
 By all the gods, I will abide by this you say.

Medea
 Enough. And, if you fail, what shall happen to you?

Aegeus
 What comes to those who have no regard for heaven.

755

Medea
 Go on your way. Farewell. For I am satisfied.

T H E M E D E A

And I will reach your city as soon as I can,
Having done the deed I have to do and gained my end.

(Aegeus goes out.)

Chorus

May Hermes, god of travelers,
Escort you, Aegeus, to your home!
And may you have the things you wish
So eagerly; for you
Appear to me to be a generous man.

760

Medea

God, and God's daughter, justice, and light of Helius!
Now, friends, has come the time of my triumph over
My enemies, and now my foot is on the road.
Now I am confident they will pay the penalty.
For this man, Aegeus, has been like a harbor to me
In all my plans just where I was most distressed.

765

To him I can fasten the cable of my safety
When I have reached the town and fortress of Pallas.
And now I shall tell to you the whole of my plan.
Listen to these words that are not spoken idly.

770

I shall send one of my servants to find Jason
And request him to come once more into my sight.
And when he comes, the words I'll say will be soft ones.
I'll say that I agree with him, that I approve
The royal wedding he has made, betraying me.

775

I'll say it was profitable, an excellent idea.
But I shall beg that my children may remain here:
Not that I would leave in a country that hates me
Children of mine to feel their enemies' insults,
But that by a trick I may kill the king's daughter.
For I will send the children with gifts in their hands
To carry to the bride, so as not to be banished—
A finely woven dress and a golden diadem.
And if she takes them and wears them upon her skin
She and all who touch the girl will die in agony;
Such poison will I lay upon the gifts I send.

780

785

But there, however, I must leave that account paid. 790
 I weep to think of what a deed I have to do
 Next after that; for I shall kill my own children.
 My children, there is none who can give them safety.
 And when I have ruined the whole of Jason's house,
 I shall leave the land and flee from the murder of my 795
 Dear children, and I shall have done a dreadful deed.
 For it is not bearable to be mocked by enemies.
 So it must happen. What profit have I in life?
 I have no land, no home, no refuge from my pain.
 My mistake was made the time I left behind me 800
 My father's house, and trusted the words of a Greek,
 Who, with heaven's help, will pay me the price for that.
 For those children he had from me he will never
 See alive again, nor will he on his new bride
 Beget another child, for she is to be forced 805
 To die a most terrible death by these my poisons.
 Let no one think me a weak one, feeble-spirited,
 A stay-at-home, but rather just the opposite,
 One who can hurt my enemies and help my friends;
 For the lives of such persons are most remembered. 810

Chorus

Since you have shared the knowledge of your plan
 with us,
 I both wish to help you and support the normal
 Ways of mankind, and tell you not to do this thing.

Medea

I can do no other thing. It is understandable
 For you to speak thus. You have not suffered as I have. 815

Chorus

But can you have the heart to kill your flesh and blood?

Medea

Yes, for this is the best way to wound my husband.

THE MEDEA

Chorus

And you, too. Of women you will be most unhappy.

Medea

So it must be. No compromise is possible.

(*She turns to the Nurse.*)

Go, you, at once, and tell Jason to come to me. 820
You I employ on all affairs of greatest trust.
Say nothing of these decisions which I have made,
If you love your mistress, if you were born a woman.

Chorus

From of old the children of Erechtheus are
Splendid, the sons of blessed gods. They dwell 825
In Athens' holy and unconquered land,
Where famous Wisdom feeds them and they pass gaily
Always through that most brilliant air where once, they
say, 830
That golden Harmony gave birth to the nine
Pure Muses of Pieria.

And beside the sweet flow of Cepheus' stream, 835
Where Cypris sailed, they say, to draw the water,
And mild soft breezes breathed along her path,
And on her hair were flung the sweet-smelling garlands 840
Of flowers of roses by the Lovers, the companions
Of Wisdom, her escort, the helpers of men
In every kind of excellence. 845

How then can these holy rivers
Or this holy land love you,
Or the city find you a home,
You, who will kill your children,
You, not pure with the rest? 850
O think of the blow at your children
And think of the blood that you shed.

O, over and over I beg you,
By your knees I beg you do not
Be the murderer of your babes!

855

O where will you find the courage
Or the skill of hand and heart,
When you set yourself to attempt
A deed so dreadful to do?
How, when you look upon them, 860
Can you tearlessly hold the decision
For murder? You will not be able,
When your children fall down and implore you,
You will not be able to dip
Steadfast your hand in their blood.

865

(Enter Jason with attendants.)

Jason

I have come at your request. Indeed, although you are
Bitter against me, this you shall have: I will listen
To what new thing you want, woman, to get from me.

Medea

Jason, I beg you to be forgiving toward me
For what I said. It is natural for you to bear with 870
My temper, since we have had much love together.
I have talked with myself about this and I have
Reproached myself. "Fool" I said, "why am I so mad?
Why am I set against those who have planned wisely?
Why make myself an enemy of the authorities 875
And of my husband, who does the best thing for me
By marrying royalty and having children who
Will be as brothers to my own? What is wrong with me?
Let me give up anger, for the gods are kind to me.
Have I not children, and do I not know that we 880
In exile from our country must be short of friends?"
When I considered this I saw that I had shown
Great lack of sense, and that my anger was foolish.
Now I agree with you. I think that you are wise

THE MEDEA

In having this other wife as well as me, and I
Was mad. I should have helped you in these plan:
yours,

Have joined in the wedding, stood by the marriage bed,
Have taken pleasure in attendance on your bride.
But we women are what we are—perhaps a little
Worthless; and you men must not be like us in this, 890
Nor be foolish in return when we are foolish.
Now, I give in, and admit that then I was wrong.
I have come to a better understanding now.

(She turns toward the house.)

Children, come here, my children, come outdoors to us!
Welcome your father with me, and say goodbye to him, 895
And with your mother, who just now was his enemy,
Join again in making friends with him who loves us.

(Enter the children, attended by the Tutor.)

We have made peace, and all our anger is over.
Take hold of his right hand—O God, I am thinking
Of something which may happen in the secret future. 900
O children, will you just so, after a long life,
Hold out your loving arms at the grave? O children,
How ready to cry I am, how full of foreboding!
I am ending at last this quarrel with your father,
And, look my soft eyes have suddenly filled with tears. 905

Chorus

And the pale tears have started also in my eyes.
O may the trouble not grow worse than now it is!

Jason

I approve of what you say. And I cannot blame you
Even for what you said before. It is natural
For a woman to be wild with her husband when he 910
Goes in for secret love. But now your mind has turned

To better reasoning. In the end you have come to
 The right decision, like the clever woman you are.
 And of you, children, your father is taking care.
 He has made, with God's help, ample provision for you. 915
 For I think that a time will come when you will be
 The leading people in Corinth with your brothers.
 You must grow up. As to the future, your father
 And those of the gods who love him will deal with that.
 I want to see you, when you have become young men, 920
 Healthy and strong, better men than my enemies.
 Medea, why are your eyes all wet with pale tears?
 Why is your cheek so white and turned away from me?
 Are not these words of mine pleasing for you to hear?

Medea

It is nothing. I was thinking about these children. 925

Jason

You must be cheerful. I shall look after them well.

Medea

I will be. It is not that I distrust your words,
 But a woman is a frail thing, prone to crying.

Jason

But why then should you grieve so much for these
 children?

Medea

I am their mother. When you prayed that they might live 930
 I felt unhappy to think that these things will be.
 But come, I have said something of the things I meant
 To say to you, and now I will tell you the rest.
 Since it is the king's will to banish me from here—
 And for me, too, I know that this is the best thing, 935
 Not to be in your way by living here or in
 The king's way, since they think me ill-disposed to
 them—

THE MEDEA

I then am going into exile from this land;
But do you, so that you may have the care of them,
Beg Creon that the children may not be banished.

940

Jason

I doubt if I'll succeed, but still I'll attempt it.

Medea

Then you must tell your wife to beg from her father
That the children may be reprieved from banishment.

Jason

I will, and with her I shall certainly succeed.

Medea

If she is like the rest of us women, you will. 945
And I, too, will take a hand with you in this business,
For I will send her some gifts which are far fairer,
I am sure of it, than those which now are in fashion,
A finely woven dress and a golden diadem,
And the children shall present them. Quick, let one of
you
Servants bring here to me that beautiful dress. 950

(*One of her attendants goes into the house.*)

She will be happy not in one way, but in a hundred,
Having so fine a man as you to share her bed,
And with this beautiful dress which Helius of old,
My father's father, bestowed on his descendants. 955

(*Enter attendant carrying the poisoned dress
and diadem.*)

There, children, take these wedding presents in your
hands.

Take them to the royal princess, the happy bride,
And give them to her. She will not think little of them.

105

Jason

No, don't be foolish, and empty your hands of these.
 Do you think the palace is short of dresses to wear?
 Do you think there is no gold there? Keep them, don't
 give them
 Away. If my wife considers me of any value,
 She will think more of me than money, I am sure of it.

960

Medea

No, let me have my way. They say the gods themselves
 Are moved by gifts, and gold does more with men than
 words.

965

Hers is the luck, her fortune that which God blesses;
 She is young and a princess; but for my children's reprieve
 I would give my very life, and not gold only.

Go children, go together to that rich palace,
 Be suppliants to the new wife of your father,
 My lady, beg her not to let you be banished.
 And give her the dress—for this is of great importance,
 That she should take the gift into her hand from yours.
 Go, quick as you can. And bring your mother good news
 By your success of those things which she longs to gain.

970

975

*(Jason goes out with his attendants, followed by the
 Tutor and the children carrying the poisoned gifts.)*

Chorus

Now there is no hope left for the children's lives.
 Now there is none. They are walking already to murder.
 The bride, poor bride, will accept the curse of the gold,
 Will accept the bright diadem.
 Around her yellow hair she will set that dress
 Of death with her own hands.

980

The grace and the perfume and glow of the golden robe
 Will charm her to put them upon her and wear the
 wreath,

And now her wedding will be with the dead below,

985

THE MEDEA

Into such a trap she will fall,
Poor thing, into such a fate of death and never
Escape from under that curse.

You, too, O wretched bridegroom, making your match
with kings, 990

You do not see that you bring
Destruction on your children and on her,
Your wife, a fearful death.
Poor soul, what a fall is yours! 995

In your grief, too, I weep, mother of little children,
You who will murder your own,
In vengeance for the loss of married love
Which Jason has betrayed 1000
As he lives with another wife.

(Enter the Tutor with the children.)

Tutor

Mistress, I tell you that these children are reprieved,
And the royal bride has been pleased to take in her hands
Your gifts. In that quarter the children are secure.

But come,
Why do you stand confused when you are fortunate? 1005
Why have you turned round with your cheek away from
me?
Are not these words of mine pleasing for you to hear?

Medea

Oh! I am lost!

Tutor

That word is not in harmony with my tidings.

Medea

I am lost, I am lost!

Tutor

Am I in ignorance telling you
Of some disaster, and not the good news I thought? 1010

Medea

You have told what you have told. I do not blame you.

Tutor

Why then this downcast eye, and this weeping of tears?

Medea

Oh, I am forced to weep, old man. The gods and I,
I in a kind of madness, have contrived all this.

Tutor

Courage! You, too, will be brought home by your
children.

1015

Medea

Ah, before that happens I shall bring others home.

Tutor

Others before you have been parted from their children.
Mortals must bear in resignation their ill luck.

Medea

That is what I shall do. But go inside the house,
And do for the children your usual daily work.

1020

*(The Tutor goes into the house. Medea turns
to her children.)*

O children, O my children, you have a city,
You have a home, and you can leave me behind you,
And without your mother you may live there forever.
But I am going in exile to another land
Before I have seen you happy and taken pleasure in you, 1025
Before I have dressed your brides and made your marriage
beds
And held up the torch at the ceremony of wedding.
Oh, what a wretch I am in this my self-willed thought!
What was the purpose, children, for which I reared you?

THE MEDEA

For all my travail and wearing myself away? 1030
 They were sterile, those pains I had in the bearing of you.
 Oh surely once the hopes in you I had, poor me,
 Were high ones: you would look after me in old age,
 And when I died would deck me well with your own
 hands;

A thing which all would have done. Oh but now it is
 gone, 1035
 That lovely thought. For, once I am left without you,
 Sad will be the life I'll lead and sorrowful for me.
 And you will never see your mother again with
 Your dear eyes, gone to another mode of living.
 Why, children, do you look upon me with your eyes? 1040
 Why do you smile so sweetly that last smile of all?
 Oh, Oh, what can I do? My spirit has gone from me,
 Friends, when I saw that bright look in the children's
 eyes.

I cannot bear to do it. I renounce my plans
 I had before. I'll take my children away from
 This land. Why should I hurt their father with the pain 1045
 They feel, and suffer twice as much of pain myself?
 No, no, I will not do it. I renounce my plans.
 Ah, what is wrong with me? Do I want to let go
 My enemies unhurt and be laughed at for it? 1050
 I must face this thing. Oh, but what a weak woman
 Even to admit to my mind these soft arguments.
 Children, go into the house. And he whom law forbids
 To stand in attendance at my sacrifices,
 Let him see to it. I shall not mar my handiwork. 1055
 Oh! Oh!
 Do not, O my heart, you must not do these things!
 Poor heart, let them go, have pity upon the children.
 If they live with you in Athens they will cheer you.
 No! By Hell's avenging furies it shall not be—
 This shall never be, that I should suffer my children 1060
 To be the prey of my enemies' insolence.
 Every way is it fixed. The bride will not escape.
 No, the diadem is now upon her head, and she, 1065

E U R I P I D E S

The royal princess, is dying in the dress, I know it.
But—for it is the most dreadful of roads for me
To tread, and them I shall send on a more dreadful still—
I wish to speak to the children.

(*She calls the children to her.*)

Come, children, give
Me your hands, give your mother your hands to kiss them. 1070
Oh the dear hands, and O how dear are these lips to me,
And the generous eyes and the bearing of my children!
I wish you happiness, but not here in this world.
What is here your father took. Oh how good to hold you!
How delicate the skin, how sweet the breath of children! 1075
Go, go! I am no longer able, no longer
To look upon you. I am overcome by sorrow.

(*The children go into the house.*)

I know indeed what evil I intend to do,
But stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury,
Fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils. 1080

(*She goes out to the right, toward the royal palace.*)

Chorus

Often before
I have gone through more subtle reasons,
And have come upon questions greater
Than a woman should strive to search out.
But we too have a goddess to help us 1085
And accompany us into wisdom.
Not all of us. Still you will find
Among many women a few,
And our sex is not without learning.
This I say, that those who have never
Had children, who know nothing of it, 1090
In happiness have the advantage
Over those who are parents.

THE MEDEA

The childless, who never discover
 Whether children turn out as a good thing 1095
 Or as something to cause pain, are spared
 Many troubles in lacking this knowledge.
 And those who have in their homes
 The sweet presence of children, I see that their lives
 Are all wasted away by their worries. 1100
 First they must think how to bring them up well and
 How to leave them something to live on.
 And then after this whether all their toil
 Is for those who will turn out good or bad,
 Is still an unanswered question.
 And of one more trouble, the last of all, 1105
 That is common to mortals I tell.
 For suppose you have found them enough for their living.
 Suppose that the children have grown into youth
 And have turned out good, still, if God so wills it,
 Death will away with your children's bodies,
 And carry them off into Hades. 1110
 What is our profit, then, that for the sake of
 Children the gods should pile upon mortals
 After all else
 This most terrible grief of all? 1115

(Enter Medea, from the spectators' right.)

Medea

Friends, I can tell you that for long I have waited
 For the event. I stare toward the place from where
 The news will come. And now, see one of Jason's servants
 Is on his way here, and that labored breath of his
 Shows he has tidings for us, and evil tidings. 1120

(Enter, also from the right, the Messenger.)

Messenger

Medea, you who have done such a dreadful thing,
 So outrageous, run for your life, take what you can,
 A ship to bear you hence or chariot on land.

Medea

And what is the reason deserves such flight as this?

Messenger

She is dead, only just now, the royal princess, 1125
And Creon dead, too, her father, by your poisons.

Medea

The finest words you have spoken. Now and hereafter
I shall count you among my benefactors and friends.

Messenger

What! Are you right in the mind? Are you not mad,
Woman? The house of the king is outraged by you. 1130
Do you enjoy it? Not afraid of such doings?

Medea

To what you say I on my side have something too
To say in answer. Do not be in a hurry, friend,
But speak. How did they die? You will delight me twice
As much again if you say they died in agony. 1135

Messenger

When those two children, born of you, had entered in,
Their father with them, and passed into the bride's house,
We were pleased, we slaves who were distressed by your
wrongs.

All through the house we were talking of but one thing,
How you and your husband had made up your quarrel. 1140
Some kissed the children's hands and some their yellow
hair,

And I myself was so full of my joy that I
Followed the children into the women's quarters.
Our mistress, whom we honor now instead of you,
Before she noticed that your two children were there, 1145
Was keeping her eye fixed eagerly on Jason.
Afterwards, however, she covered up her eyes,

THE MEDEA

Her cheek paled, and she turned herself away from him,
So disgusted was she at the children's coming there.
But your husband tried to end the girl's bad temper, 1150
And said "You must not look unkindly on your friends.
Cease to be angry. Turn your head to me again.
Have as your friends the same ones as your husband has.
And take these gifts, and beg your father to reprieve
These children from their exile. Do it for my sake." 1155
She, when she saw the dress, could not restrain herself.
She agreed with all her husband said, and before
He and the children had gone far from the palace,
She took the gorgeous robe and dressed herself in it,
And put the golden crown around her curly locks, 1160
And arranged the set of the hair in a shining mirror,
And smiled at the lifeless image of herself in it.
Then she rose from her chair and walked about the room,
With her gleaming feet stepping most soft and delicate,
All overjoyed with the present. Often and often 1165
She would stretch her foot out straight and look along it.
But after that it was a fearful thing to see.
The color of her face changed, and she staggered back,
She ran, and her legs trembled, and she only just
Managed to reach a chair without falling flat down. 1170
An aged woman servant who, I take it, thought
This was some seizure of Pan or another god,
Cried out "God bless us," but that was before she saw
The white foam breaking through her lips and her rolling
The pupils of her eyes and her face all bloodless. 1175
Then she raised a different cry from that "God bless us,"
A huge shriek, and the women ran, one to the king,
One to the newly wedded husband to tell him
What had happened to his bride; and with frequent
sound
The whole of the palace rang as they went running. 1180
One walking quickly round the course of a race-track
Would now have turned the bend and be close to the
goal,
When she, poor girl, opened her shut and speechless eye,

E U R I P I D E S

And with a terrible groan she came to herself.
For a twofold pain was moving up against her. 1185
The wreath of gold that was resting around her head
Let forth a fearful stream of all-devouring fire,
And the finely woven dress your children gave to her,
Was fastening on the unhappy girl's fine flesh.
She leapt up from the chair, and all on fire she ran, 1190
Shaking her hair now this way and now that, trying
To hurl the diadem away; but fixedly
The gold preserved its grip, and, when she shook her hair,
Then more and twice as fiercely the fire blazed out.
Till, beaten by her fate, she fell down to the ground, 1195
Hard to be recognized except by a parent.
Neither the setting of her eyes was plain to see,
Nor the shapeliness of her face. From the top of
Her head there oozed out blood and fire mixed together.
Like the drops on pine-bark, so the flesh from her bones 1200
Dropped away, torn by the hidden fang of the poison.
It was a fearful sight; and terror held us all
From touching the corpse. We had learned from what
had happened.
But her wretched father, knowing nothing of the event,
Came suddenly to the house, and fell upon the corpse, 1205
And at once cried out and folded his arms about her,
And kissed her and spoke to her, saying, "O my poor
child,
What heavenly power has so shamefully destroyed you?
And who has set me here like an ancient sepulcher,
Deprived of you? O let me die with you, my child!" 1210
And when he had made an end of his wailing and crying,
Then the old man wished to raise himself to his feet;
But, as the ivy clings to the twigs of the laurel,
So he stuck to the fine dress, and he struggled fearfully.
For he was trying to lift himself to his knee, 1215
And she was pulling him down, and when he tugged hard
He would be ripping his aged flesh from his bones.
At last his life was quenched, and the unhappy man
Gave up the ghost, no longer could hold up his head.

THE MEDEA

There they lie close, the daughter and the old father,
Dead bodies, an event he prayed for in his tears.
As for your interests, I will say nothing of them,
For you will find your own escape from punishment.
Our human life I think and have thought a shadow,
And I do not fear to say that those who are held
Wise among men and who search the reasons of things
Are those who bring the most sorrow on themselves.
For of mortals there is no one who is happy.
If wealth flows in upon one, one may be perhaps
Luckier than one's neighbor, but still not happy. 1225

(Exit.)

Chorus

Heaven, it seems, on this day has fastened many
Evils on Jason, and Jason has deserved them.
Poor girl, the daughter of Creon, how I pity you
And your misfortunes, you who have gone quite away
To the house of Hades because of marrying Jason. 1235

Medea

Women, my task is fixed: as quickly as I may
To kill my children, and start away from this land,
And not, by wasting time, to suffer my children
To be slain by another hand less kindly to them.
Force every way will have it they must die, and since 1240
This must be so, then I, their mother, shall kill them.
Oh, arm yourself in steel, my heart! Do not hang back
From doing this fearful and necessary wrong.
Oh, come, my hand, poor wretched hand, and take the
sword,
Take it, step forward to this bitter starting point, 1245
And do not be a coward, do not think of them,
How sweet they are, and how you are their mother. Just
for
This one short day be forgetful of your children,
Afterward weep; for even though you will kill them,
They were very dear—Oh, I am an unhappy woman! 1250

(With a cry she rushes into the house.)

E U R I P I D E S

Chorus

O Earth, and the far shining
Ray of the Sun, look down, look down upon
This poor lost woman, look, before she raises
The hand of murder against her flesh and blood.
Yours was the golden birth from which
She sprang, and now I fear divine
Blood may be shed by men.

O heavenly light, hold back her hand,
Check her, and drive from out the house
The bloody Fury raised by fiends of Hell.

1255

1260

Vain waste, your care of children;
Was it in vain you bore the babes you loved,
After you passed the inhospitable strait
Between the dark blue rocks, Symplegades?

O wretched one, how has it come,
This heavy anger on your heart,
This cruel bloody mind?
For God from mortals asks a stern
Price for the stain of kindred blood
In like disaster falling on their homes.

1265

1270

(*A cry from one of the children is heard.*)

Chorus

Do you hear the cry, do you hear the children's cry?
O you hard heart, O woman fated for evil!

One of the children (from within)

What can I do and how escape my mother's hands?

Another child (from within)

O my dear brother, I cannot tell. We are lost.

Chorus

Shall I enter the house? Oh, surely I should
Defend the children from murder.

1275

THE MEDEA

A child (from within)

O help us, in God's name, for now we need your help.
Now, now we are close to it. We are trapped by the
sword.

Chorus

O your heart must have been made of rock or steel,
You who can kill

1280

With your own hand the fruit of your own womb.
Of one alone I have heard, one woman alone
Of those of old who laid her hands on her children,
Ino, sent mad by heaven when the wife of Zeus
Drove her out from her home and made her wander;
And because of the wicked shedding of blood
Of her own children she threw
Herself, poor wretch, into the sea and stepped away
Over the sea-cliff to die with her two children.

1285

What horror more can be? O women's love,
So full of trouble,
How many evils have you caused already!

1290

(Enter Jason, with attendants.)

Jason

You women, standing close in front of this dwelling,
Is she, Medea, she who did this dreadful deed,
Still in the house, or has she run away in flight?
For she will have to hide herself beneath the earth,
Or raise herself on wings into the height of air,
If she wishes to escape the royal vengeance.

1295

Does she imagine that, having killed our rulers,
She will herself escape uninjured from this house?
But I am thinking not so much of her as for
The children—her the king's friends will make to suffer
For what she did. So I have come to save the lives
Of my boys, in case the royal house should harm them
While taking vengeance for their mother's wicked deed.

1300

1305

E U R I P I D E S

Chorus

O Jason, if you but knew how deeply you are
Involved in sorrow, you would not have spoken so.

Jason

What is it? That she is planning to kill me also?

Chorus

Your children are dead, and by their own mother's hand.

Jason

What! That is it? O woman, you have destroyed me! 1310

Chorus

You must make up your mind your children are no more.

Jason

Where did she kill them? Was it here or in the house?

Chorus

Open the gates and there you will see them murdered.

Jason

Quick as you can unlock the doors, men, and undo
The fastenings and let me see this double evil,
My children dead and her—Oh her I will repay. 1315

*(His attendants rush to the door. Medea appears above
the house in a chariot drawn by dragons. She has
the dead bodies of the children with her.)*

Medea

Why do you batter these gates and try to unbar them,
Seeking the corpses and for me who did the deed?
You may cease your trouble, and if you have need of me,
Speak, if you wish. You will never touch me with your
hand, 1320

Such a chariot has Helius, my father's father,
Given me to defend me from my enemies.

THE MEDEA

Jason

You hateful thing, you woman most utterly loathed
 By the gods and me and by all the race of mankind,
 You who have had the heart to raise a sword against 1325
 Your children, you, their mother, and left me childless—
 You have done this, and do you still look at the sun
 And at the earth, after these most fearful doings?
 I wish you dead. Now I see it plain, though at that time
 I did not, when I took you from your foreign home 1330
 And brought you to a Greek house, you, an evil thing,
 A traitress to your father and your native land.
 The gods hurled the avenging curse of yours on me.
 For your own brother you slew at your own hearthside,
 And then came aboard that beautiful ship, the Argo. 1335
 And that was your beginning. When you were married
 To me, your husband, and had borne children to me,
 For the sake of pleasure in the bed you killed them.
 There is no Greek woman who would have dared such
 deeds,
 Out of all those whom I passed over and chose you 1340
 To marry instead, a bitter destructive match,
 A monster, not a woman, having a nature
 Wilder than that of Scylla in the Tuscan sea.
 Ah! no, not if I had ten thousand words of shame
 Could I sting you. You are naturally so brazen. 1345
 Go, worker in evil, stained with your children's blood.
 For me remains to cry aloud upon my fate,
 Who will get no pleasure from my newly wedded love,
 And the boys whom I begot and brought up, never
 Shall I speak to them alive. Oh, my life is over! 1350

Medea

Long would be the answer which I might have made to
 These words of yours, if Zeus the father did not know
 How I have treated you and what you did to me.
 No, it was not to be that you should scorn my love,
 And pleasantly live your life through, laughing at me; 1355
 Nor would the princess, nor he who offered the match,

Creon, drive me away without paying for it.
 So now you may call me a monster, if you wish,
 A Scylla housed in the caves of the Tuscan sea.
 I too, as I had to, have taken hold of your heart.

1360

Jason

You feel the pain yourself. You share in my sorrow.

Medea

Yes, and my grief is gain when you cannot mock it.

Jason

O children, what a wicked mother she was to you!

Medea

They died from a disease they caught from their father.

Jason

I tell you it was not my hand that destroyed them.

1365

Medea

But it was your insolence, and your virgin wedding.

Jason

And just for the sake of that you chose to kill them.

Medea

Is love so small a pain, do you think, for a woman?

Jason

For a wise one, certainly. But you are wholly evil.

Medea

The children are dead. I say this to make you suffer.

1370

Jason

The children, I think, will bring down curses on you.

Medea

The gods know who was the author of this sorrow.

T H E M E D E A

Jason

Yes, the gods know indeed, they know your loathsome heart.

Medea

Hate me. But I tire of your barking bitterness.

Jason

And I of yours. It is easier to leave you.

1375

Medea

How then? What shall I do? I long to leave you too.

Jason

Give me the bodies to bury and to mourn them.

Medea

No, that I will not. I will bury them myself,
Bearing them to Hera's temple on the promontory;
So that no enemy may evilly treat them
By tearing up their grave. In this land of Corinth
I shall establish a holy feast and sacrifice
Each year for ever to atone for the blood guilt.
And I myself go to the land of Erechtheus
To dwell in Aegeus' house, the son of Pandion.
While you, as is right, will die without distinction,
Struck on the head by a piece of the Argo's timber,
And you will have seen the bitter end of my love.

1380

1385

Jason

May a Fury for the children's sake destroy you,
And justice, Requitor of blood.

1390

Medea

What heavenly power lends an ear
To a breaker of oaths, a deceiver?

Jason

Oh, I hate you, murderer of children.

E U R I P I D E S

Medea

Go to your palace. Bury your bride.

Jason

I go, with two children to mourn for.

1395

Medea

Not yet do you feel it. Wait for the future.

Jason

Oh, children I loved!

Medea

I loved them, you did not.

Jason

You loved them, and killed them.

Medea

To make you feel pain.

Jason

Oh, wretch that I am, how I long
To kiss the dear lips of my children!

1400

Medea

Now you would speak to them, now you would kiss them.
Then you rejected them.

Jason

Let me, I beg you,
Touch my boys' delicate flesh.

Medea

I will not. Your words are all wasted.

Jason

O God, do you hear it, this persecution,
These my sufferings from this hateful
Woman, this monster, murderer of children?

1405

T H E M E D E A

Still what I can do that I will do:
I will lament and cry upon heaven,
Calling the gods to bear me witness
How you have killed my boys and prevent me from
Touching their bodies or giving them burial.
I wish I had never begot them to see them
Afterward slaughtered by you.

1410-

Chorus

Zeus in Olympus is the overseer
Of many doings. Many things the gods
Achieve beyond our judgment. What we thought
Is not confirmed and what we thought not god
Contrives. And so it happens in this story.

1415

(*Curtain.*)

THE HERACLEIDAE

Translated and with an Introduction by

RALPH GLADSTONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE HERACLEIDAE

The Legend

Eurystheus, king of Argos, was given control over his cousin Heracles through the contrivance of Hera. He persecuted Heracles throughout that hero's life, sending him on the famous and perilous "Labors." After Heracles had died and been transformed into a god, Eurystheus continued to persecute the family. Wherever these disinherited refugees went, he would send his herald to demand that they be denied sanctuary. He was the most powerful king in Greece, and none dared resist him. But in Attica the Heracleidae finally found a state which was willing to defend their rights; and when Eurystheus invaded Attica to claim them by force, he was defeated and killed.

Such were the main outlines of the legend, at least the Athenian legend (there was a Theban variant as well). Aeschylus had written a tragedy on the subject, and Athenian playwrights loved to glorify an ancient Athens which had stood up for the weak and the oppressed (Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*; Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*; Euripides, *The Suppliants*, *Medea*, *Heracles*). There are certain details which Euripides either invented or chose to emphasize. He is the first, as far as we know, to bring in the self-immolation of a daughter of Heracles. He also makes a major character out of Iolaus, Heracles' nephew and old companion-in-arms, at the expense of Hyllus, the eldest of the Heracleidae. Some said Hyllus killed Eurystheus, others that Iolaus did. Euripides makes Hyllus a son who is of fighting age, and the messenger's account of the battle gives him an honorable part, but Hyllus

never appears on stage. The leader of the Heracleidae is Iolaus, a decrepit but indomitable warrior who is rejuvenated in the course of battle and becomes the hero of the day. Finally, instead of having Eurystheus killed in battle (all other authorities do, as far as we know), Euripides makes Iolaus take him prisoner and have him handed over to Alcmene, who puts him to death over the protests of the Athenians. This last feature may have a bearing on the date and occasion of the play.

The Date

No date for this play has been given by ancient authorities. The versification has technical qualities which find a parallel in three early-dated tragedies: *Alcestis* (438 B.C.), *Medea* (431 B.C.), and *Hippolytus* (428 B.C.). The dating and interpretation may be further helped if we consider an event which took place between autumn of 430 and winter or early spring of 429 B.C. At that time Athens was at war with the Peloponnesian League. Five Peloponnesian envoys, on their way to the king of Persia, were treacherously seized by friends of the Athenians in Thrace, brought to Athens, and there "put to death on the day of their arrival, without trial and without permission to say some things they wished to say" (Thucydides ii. 67. 4; also mentioned by Herodotus vii. 137. 3). Since our play deals with the summary execution of an unarmed prisoner and was written at some date not far from 430, we can hardly ignore this event. Of course, *The Heracleidae* may have been written and produced earlier; but if we date it just after the execution of the envoys, we may understand why Euripides chose to end the play with the execution of Eurystheus instead of his death in battle.

This abruptly changes the whole direction of the play and reverses our sympathies. From the beginning, we have been made to take the side of the innocent Heracleidae and their gallant protectors against the wicked king, who, not content with his abuse of the father, insists on hunting the children and their feeble guardians to death. It is as simple as that, sheer white against black. The outrageousness of the Argive

king is aggravated by a truculent herald; the virtue of the afflicted by the self-sacrifice of a virgin martyr. But when at last Eurystheus appears, he is nothing like his herald; he frankly admits his past misdeeds, neither extenuating nor boasting, and faces death with calm dignity. It is Alcmene who turns horrible in her insistence on revenge, while the Athenians (represented by the chorus) appear, though Euripides does his best for them, as nothing much better than weak well-meaners.

Why has this been done, when following the accepted (so we presume) legend and having Eurystheus killed in battle would have meant an acceptable "straight" play? Euripides knew that brutality brutalizes; people who have been injured or abused too long become worse than their tormentors (*Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Creusa*, *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Dionysus*). But this reversal is uncommonly sudden and lacks the careful and convincing motivation which we find in *Medea*, *Ion*, *Orestes*, and elsewhere. I would hazard a guess that the envoys were executed in the winter, not very long before the spring productions; that Euripides was still at work on *The Heracleidae*, and the event made him change the end of the play to suit the occasion. There are certain signs of haste in the writing. Euripides obviously could and did write iambics at breakneck speed, but *The Heracleidae* has a smaller proportion of the far more difficult choral lyric than any other Euripidean play. If the manuscript is sound (but it may not be) the end of the play is carelessly composed. One other point is the more than usual emphasis on woman's place in a modest, but determined, maiden's apology for public appearance; it recalls the pronouncement of Pericles in the winter of 431-430 to the effect that women should not even be seen, much less heard (*Thucydides* ii. 45. 2).

My guess, then, is spring 429 B.C. for this play. The execution was a horror, the worse because just retaliation was pleaded, as if two wrongs were to make a right. But both Athens and Sparta were to do far worse still. This play has an Athens still unbrutalized, though acquiescent; it is the wronged and rescued suppliants who turn beastly; and who

are these but the ancestors of the Lacedaemonians, after all? The Argives (neutral in 429; but one Argive *was* executed at Athens) are not so bad as we thought, though all heralds grow arrogant on their sacred immunity. There is plenty of "glorious Athens," and "liberty" is a key word. But Athens has slipped, this once. Euripides' faith in his city is not to be broken for a long time, but here is reproof and warning.

The Play

It is rapid, with little lyric or high poetry, not profound but, despite the melodrama, often shrewd. The young king is really a democrat in disguise; will do nothing without the people's consent; and therefore, while ready to protect the afflicted, cannot help wishing (like the king in *The Suppliants* of Aeschylus) that these particular suppliants had never come his way. Macaria seems a mere abstraction of virtue, until her outburst at Iolaus, when he offers to spoil her act, shows her as human after all. The most challenging piece of treatment is that accorded to Iolaus. Why must he be so old? We are not to press legendary ages, but, after all, Iolaus was of the generation of Hyllus, not of Alcmene; he was the nephew of Heracles, not his uncle. Probably, for one thing, for the story. The point is that the Heracleidae are helpless until helped by Athens and cannot be protected by two strong fighters of their own. So Hyllus comes in as an afterthought and is kept (with his army) off stage, while Iolaus is superannuated. Therefore, also, Demophon is king of Athens instead of Good King Theseus, as in other versions; Demophon can be more plausibly represented as a younger man. But also the theme of resolute old age and of rejuvenation seems to fascinate the tragedian. The prototype is Laertes in the 24th book of the *Odyssey*. But it has been suggested that Aeschylus in his lost play rejuvenated Iolaus, and, if so, Euripides is (as elsewhere) having his fun with Aeschylus. For there is irony, at least, in the treatment of Iolaus. As to whether the miracle ever took place at all, the messenger prefaches his account in the best manner of Herodotus, the scientific historian of the day: "Up

THE HERACLEIDAE

to this point [the prayer of Iolaus] I am telling you what I saw; for what followed, I am telling you what they tell me." Note that no rejuvenated Iolaus returns to the stage. The going forth to battle of Iolaus is indisputably comic, though it is that tragic funniness that makes old age so cruel (Aeschylus with Cilissa in *The Libation Bearers*, the Prophetess in *The Eumenides*). As so often, Euripides has tried to cram too much into one play, to move in too many directions at once; but he has made livelier what started as a most conventional piece.

One feature of the play is the supernumerary male children of Heracles. They are on stage, presumably, from start to finish, though they say nothing. The play is named from them, not, as usually, from the chorus or a principal character. Neither the daughter of Heracles nor the herald is named in the text. The names Macaria and Copreus are in the ancient *dramatis personae*. The latter comes from the *Iliad*. The scene is at Marathon, on the coast of Attica.

C H A R A C T E R S

Iolaus, an old man and friend of Heracles

Copreus, herald of Eurystheus

Chorus of old men of Marathon

Demophon, son of Theseus and king of Athens

Macaria, daughter of Heracles

Alcmene, mother of Heracles

Attendants

Eurystheus, king of Argos and Mycenae

Small children of Heracles, guards, townspeople

THE HERACLEIDAE

SCENE: *Before the Temple of Zeus at Marathon.*

(*Iolaus, accompanied by small children of Heracles, enters.*)

Iolaus

For years I've known that anyone who's just
Is born to serve his neighbors, but the man
Who will persist in feathering his nest
Has got no public spirit and is hard
To deal with, as I've found out to my cost.

And though I could have lived respectably
In Argos, with my family and in peace,
As right-hand man of Heracles, I served
Through his worst trials, while he still was alive.

Now he's in heaven, and as guardian of
His children, I could use a guard myself.
When he was dead and gone, Eurystheus
Decided to eliminate us, too.

We got away, and, though we saved our skins,
Our home is gone; and now we stand condemned

To keep on wandering from state to state,
Because this king, whose record is as black
As sin, has had the front to lay on us
A new humiliation. Anywhere

We go, when he finds out, he sends someone
To bully them into expelling us,
And claims his town's too strong and he's too rich
To risk offending. When our hosts recall
That *these* are orphans, that *I've* no support,

5

10

15

20

EURIPIDES

They cringe and end by sending us away. 25
 With displaced children I displace myself
 To share with those who have more than their share
 Of sorrows. If I left them, men might say,
 "He failed to do his duty by them, once
 Their father died, in spite of family ties." 30
 And since the rest of Greece is banned to us,
 We've reached the neighborhood of Marathon
 To throw ourselves upon the mercy of
 The gods and seek their help. Two kings, I'm told,
 Of Pandion's and Theseus' line have here 35
 Come into power, both our relatives.
 That's why we've come to the world-famous state
 Of Athens, on a trip conceived and planned
 By two old strategists. So I, for one,
 Am seeing to the safety of these boys. 40
 Meanwhile Alcmene minds the girls and keeps
 Them all inside the temple. It would look
 Highly improper if we let them stand
 In front of it, exposed to people's eyes.
 Then Hyllus and the older boys have gone 45
 To find another refuge, just in case
 We ever should be forced to leave this town.
 Quick, children! Come back! Hold on tight!
 That's Eurystheus' herald coming here,
 The one that has us chased from place to place, 50

(Enter *Copreus*.)

And made us homeless refugees. Scum!
 I'll see you damned and your employer too.
 Why, you're the selfsame man who used to bring
 Bad news repeatedly to Heracles.

Copreus

Oh come now, do you really think you've found 55
 A refuge and protection? Are you mad
 Enough to think that anyone would choose
 Your helplessness in preference to our strength?

THE HERACLEIDAE

Why don't you stop this fuss? You're bound to come
Right back to Argos and a stony end.

60

Iolaus

Not on your life! I'm well protected by
God's temple and this free and sovereign state.

Copreus

Oh, then you'll give my muscles exercise?

Iolaus

You wouldn't dare to take us out by force.

Copreus

You'll soon see how wrong that prediction is.

65

(*Tries to seize children.*)

Iolaus

Then over my dead body, if you do.

Copreus

Keep out of this. I need no leave from you
To take away my master's property.

(*Throws Iolaus down.*)

Iolaus

Help! Men of this historic town, though we're
Protected by Zeus's temple in the square,
We've been assaulted and our wreaths defiled,
Which outrages the city and the gods!

70

Chorus

You there! Just what's the meaning of all this
Ungodly noise, and by the altar too?
Oh! This poor old man is lying
On the ground. What a shameful thing!
Who was it handled you so brutally?

75

Iolaus

This man here dragged me from the altar by
Main force, and showed contempt for all your gods.

Chorus

What country are you coming from, old man?
Have you reached these federated states
By the blade of the oar in the sea? Were you
Rowed over here from some Eubocan port?

Iolaus

No, we're no islanders. We've made our way
To Athens from Mycenae.

Chorus

And what name did you go by
Among the Mycenaean citizens?

Iolaus

You've heard of me, I think. I'm Iolaus,
Known as the right-hand man of Heracles.

Chorus

The name has a familiar ring. But please,
Why don't you tell us whose young children these
Are, whom you're leading by the hand?

Iolaus

These are the sons of Heracles, who've come
To ask protection here from you and yours.

Chorus

Just what is it you want of us? Are you
Applying for a hearing here?

Iolaus

We ask you to stand by us and to keep
The Argives from abducting us by force.

THE HERACLEIDA E

Copreus

That's hardly good enough. Your betters here
Have found you and will have the final say.

100

Chorus

The rights of those the gods protect
Are bound to be respected. To go off
And leave an altar desecrated makes
A mockery of justice.

Copreus

Who spoke of such a thing? I'm asking you
To drive my master's subjects from the land.

105

Chorus

That would be sacrilegious,
Rejecting people who demand our help.

Copreus

It would be healthier to change your minds
And keep your city out of trouble's way.

110

Chorus

Instead of kidnapping these refugees
So brazenly, you should have seen the king
And shown respect for Athens' sovereign rights.

Copreus

Now that you mention it, who is the king?

Chorus

Demophon, son of the great Theseus.

115

Copreus

Oh, then my business lies with him! All this
Is just a waste of breath and nothing more.

Chorus

Look! There he comes, and his brother Acamas.
They're hurrying to judge this whole affair.

(Enter *Demophon*, with *Acamas*.)

Demophon

Since you old men rushed here upon the scene,
Before the young ones helped or reached the shrine,
Suppose you tell us just what's drawn this crowd?

120

Chorus

These children, who have hung the altar with
The wreaths you see, are Heracles' sons.
Iolaus was their father's right-hand man.

125

Demophon

But why were there such awful cries for help?

Chorus

That man just tried to drag them all away,
Which caused the cries we heard. The way he threw
That poor old man down touched me to the heart.

Demophon

Although he looks and dresses like a Greek,
It needs a savage to behave like that.
Stranger, it's up to you. Be quick and let
Me know what sort of country you come from.

130

Copreus

Well, since you ask, I come from Argos. Now
I'll tell who sent me and just why I'm here.
It was Eurystheus of Mycenae told
Me to come here and bring these back. I have
Authority for all I do or say;
Since, as an Argive, I'm recovering
These Argive nationals who've run away,

135

138

140

THE HERACLEIDAE

Though legally condemned to death at home.
We have a perfect right to carry out
The laws we make for our own sovereign land.
I've often made this point, each time I reached
A new "protector." Not a single one
Was ever rash enough to play with fire. 145

Now they've come here. Why, they must take you for
Colossal fools, or else they want to take
One reckless chance and get it over with.
They can't think seriously that you alone
Of all the Greeks they've seen would feel for them 150
In their sad state, unless you'd lost your minds;
Consider what you stand to gain if you
Should let them in or let us take them out.

For our part we can offer to you all
The weight of power; our king's great influence 155
Will be behind your town in all you do.
But if their artful talk and wailing move
Your pity, that can only mean one thing.
A total war! Don't you believe that we'll
Give up our fight and bring no steel into play. 160
But why should you provoke us? Have we seized
What's yours? Are we aggressors? Or is your
Allies' security at stake? What kind
Of cause is this to die for? Your own men
Will surely curse your name if you insist 165
On scuttling everything so recklessly
For these young brats and this half-dead old man.
You may believe the long view bears you out,
But that will hardly help you now, my friend. 170

These boys would never stand against our arms,
Not even as grown men, as you may hope.
Well, anyhow that day's far off, and you'll
Be dealt with in the meantime; take my word
For that. We're asking nothing, but we want 175
To take back what is ours. I know that you
Are in the habit of declaring for
The underdog by choice. I warn you. Don't.

Chorus

It's very hard to judge or understand
A case like this until we've heard both sides.

180

Iolaus

I'll say in your land's favor, Majesty,
I'm not being driven out of *here* at least
Until I've listened and have had my say.
This man is nothing to us, and we want
No part of Argos. That's been so since they
Passed sentence on us; we're expatriates.
What earthly right has he to drag us all
Back to the town that drove us out, as though
They still had claims on us. We're aliens now.
Must Argive exiles leave the rest of Greece?

185

You can't intimidate Athenians
And make them drive out Heracles' own sons.

190

This isn't an Achaeans town, you know,
Or Trachis, so your heavy-handed ways
Of getting temples to evict us and
Your saber-rattling will not work here.

195

If I were wrong, and you should have your way,
This wouldn't be the free state that I know.

But I *do* know what stuff they're made of here.

200

They'd sooner die. Like all right-thinking men
They're sure that death is better than disgrace.

So much for Athens. It's a bad mistake
To overpraise, and I myself have been
Annoyed at getting more than was my due.

But, I'll explain why you're in duty bound
To save these boys, as ruler of this land.

205

Pittheus was Pelops' son and in his turn
Sired Aethra, who gave birth to Theseus,
Your father. Now, to come back to these boys,
Their father springs from Zeus and Alcmene,
And she was Pelops' daughter, which would make
Near cousins of your father and of theirs.
So much for ties of blood, and now I'll tell

210

THE HERACLEIDAE

What else obliges you to stand up for them.

I carried Heracles' own shield upon

215

The bloody expedition to bring back

For Theseus the Amazon queen's belt.

And Heracles, as every Greek knows, saved

Your father from the moated depths of hell.

And in return, what they now ask of you

220

Is not to be betrayed, not to be torn

By force from altars and from your frontiers.

It would be a disgrace for you, for all

Of Athens to let refugees—and those

Your cousins, too—be dragged off. Oh, my God!

225

Just look at them! On my knees I beg of you!

For pity's sake! Oh please don't let them go!

The sons of Heracles are in your hands.

Then prove yourself their cousin and their friend,

Their father, brother, ruler, all in one,

230

Rather than throw them to their enemies.

Chorus

This story touches all our hearts. We've seen

Now for the first time what it is to be

Well-born, yet in distress. Nobility

Can suffer, and through no fault of its own.

235

Demophon

Three factors have decided me against

Expelling, Iolaus, friends and guests.

For, first and foremost, you took refuge at

God's altar, with these children at your side.

Then family ties, and for our father's sake,

240

A debt of honor to be kind to them.

Last, but not least, concern for my prestige.

If I let strangers break the temple bounds,

Then everyone will say we gave these up

To Argos out of fear and that we're not

245

Our own real masters here. I'd sooner die.

Don't be afraid. I wish you could have come

E U R I P I D E S

In better days, but nobody would dare
To touch you or the children while you're here.

(To *Herald.*)

Go back home, and there say to your king
He'll have a hearing if he likes, but you
Won't take these refugees away with you.

250

Copreus

Not even if my claim is right and wins?

Demophon

What? Right to drag off refugees by force?

Copreus

If I get a bad name, it won't hurt you.

255

Demophon

But I will too, if I let you drag them home.

Copreus

Just banish them, I'll do the rest myself.

Demophon

You fool! To think you can outwit the god!

Copreus

This is a nest for outlaws, I can see.

Demophon

The temple gives protection to all men.

260

Copreus

My countrymen may not agree with you.

Demophon

But I'm the master when in my own house.

THE HERACLEIDAE

Copreus

If you behave yourself and don't harm us.

Demophon

I'll chance that rather than outrage the gods.

Copreus

I wouldn't want to see you fighting us.

265

Demophon

No more would I, but still I'll stand by these.

Copreus

I'll take what's mine back with me, just the same.

Demophon

You think so? Well, you won't get very far.

Copreus

In any case I'll try the thing and see.

(*Tries to seize children again.*)

Demophon

You'll lay a hand on them at your own risk!

270

(*Makes threatening motion.*)

Chorus

For heaven's sake, don't hit a diplomat.

Demophon

Then let the diplomat behave himself.

Chorus

Yes, go away. Don't touch him, Majesty!

Copreus

I'm going, since I'm quite outnumbered here.

But I'll return with armies at my back.

275

There's an enormous army waiting for

Me with Eurystheus at the head. He's at
 The boundaries of Alcathus' own state
 And stands on the alert. So when he hears
 Of this disgrace, he'll strike you like a flash,
 You and your land and every living thing.
 What are our soldiers for if not to fight
 And punish you, who give us ample cause?

280

Demophon

To hell with you! Your Argos won't make me
 Give in an inch, and you won't drag these off
 And shame us, since we take no orders here
 From Argos, but we do just as we like.

285

(Exit *Copreus*.)*Chorus*

Time to think about defense
 Before their army strikes our soil.
 Argives were always bloodthirsty, but now
 What they'll soon learn will make them twice as fierce.
 Since diplomats are all alike and will
 Distort and magnify what they've gone through.
 I know he'll tell his lord he was so
 Mistreated here that, all in all,
 He barely got his skin away.

290

295

Iolaus

There's nothing better for a boy than to
 Have had a good and noble father and
 To marry well. I can't approve of those
 Who go below their station out of love
 And compromise their sons through their own lust.
 Since noble people stand adversity
 Much better than the mob; for instance, we
 Were at our last gasp, till we found these friends
 And relatives. Alone of all the Greeks,
 They've dared to stand up and defend our rights.
 There, children, go and give your hand to them,
 And you give your hand too. Now, go ahead!

300

305

THE HERACLEIDAE

O children, these are really friends in need.
If you should ever see your native land
And home again and there receive your due,
Remember them as friends who saved your lives.
With this in mind, don't ever fight with them
At all, but treat them as your best allies.
They've earned your full respect by taking on
A formidable enemy on our
Account. Though we'd no place to lay our heads,
They didn't drive us out or let us go
For all of that. And I for one must say
That while I live and breathe—and after, too—
I'll honor you like Theseus and I'll sing
Your praises everywhere and tell the world
How well you treated and protected these
Young children. You've kept up your father's name
In Greece. You're living up to the high standard
Set by your great family in every way.
That's most unusual. You'll find, I think,
That very few men match their fathers now.

Chorus

We've always felt it was the decent thing
To succor men who couldn't help themselves.
We've fought for others many times before,
And now we see a new war coming up. 330

Demophon

Thank you. I'm sure of your sincerity,
Old man, and that you're grateful, as you say.
And now I've got to mobilize my men
And station them so that the enemy
Will get a hot reception. First my scouts
Will go to see we're not caught by surprise.
The Argives waste no time in their attacks.
Meanwhile I'll sacrifice with seers, but
You take the children from this altar and
Go to my palace. You'll be in good hands
While this keeps me away. Why, go ahead.

Iolaus

No, I'll stay at the altar. We'll sit down
 And wait and pray until you've won the fight.
 And when your triumph is complete, we'll go
 Home with you. I think that the gods
 On our side are more than a match for theirs.
 Hera may be their patron but we have
 Athena; and what counts in the long run
 Is having stronger gods upon your side.
 Pallas will never let the others win.

345

350

(Exit *Demophon*.)*Chorus*

STROPHE

Then brag away until you're hoarse.
 But know that Argive bluster can't
 Affect our minds, nor can it force
 Us to turn tail. Not for such rant
 As this of yours to bring our great
 And lovely city down so low
 And leave her prey to such a fate.
 To think you and your king are so
 Crack-brained as that!

355

360

ANTISTROPHE

To kidnap refugees, and those
 The wards of both our gods and men,
 Is bad enough, for one who knows
 Our state's as good as yours; and then
 To have a stranger treat our king
 Like dirt, without a single claim
 To right and justice is a thing
 That only fools and men past shame
 Can well defend.

365

370

EPODE

We're peaceful men, but in advance
 We warn a king who's gone berserk
 To keep away. He'll have no chance
 To carry out his dirty work.

THE HERACLEIDAE

Though butchery's his special field,
 We'll hold our own if it should come
 To handling a spear or shield.
 He'd better keep his creatures from
 Attacking Athens, hold his hand,
 And not pollute our lovely land.

375

(Re-enter Demophon.)

380

Iolaus

My son, why are you looking so depressed?
 Bad news about the Argive movements? Don't
 Keep us all guessing. Is all quiet or
 Are they advancing? What their herald said
 Is worth attention, as their king will come
 Here as the pet of chance and of the gods,
 And cordially detests this city, to boot.
 Still, in the end, Zeus sees to it that no
 One can afford such high and mighty airs.

385

Demophon

The Argives and their king are on the way.
 I've reconnoitered, since a man who sets
 Up for a decent general has got
 To see these things himself, not second-hand.
 They haven't reached the plain; their leader keeps
 Them on the rocky cliff. He's looking for
 A way to bring his army to the heart
 Of Attica, and camp there, I should think,
 Without unnecessary risk. And our
 Own preparations are complete; the town
 Is on a battle footing. We're about
 To offer all the things up to the gods
 Required to save us and to win the fight.
 While priests are sacrificing everywhere,
 I've had all oracles, all old and well-known
 Or confidential forecasts analyzed
 To find out what to do. In most respects
 They varied a great deal, but in one thing
 They tally every one: we have to give

390

395

400

405

Up to Demeter's child as victim a
 Young lady of respectable descent.
 Now you'll admit, I've done my best for you. 410
 But I can hardly kill my child, or force
 Another citizen to such a point.
 Only a lunatic would let his child
 Be killed that way, and angry groups in all
 The streets are thrashing out the question now. 415
 Some say we're bound to fight for refugees;
 While others claim I've acted like a fool.
 So if I did this for you, I would have
 A full-scale civil war upon my hands.
 However, maybe you can find a way 420
 To save yourselves and us as well without
 My losing face upon this issue. As
 I'm not a tyrant over savages,
 Good government must be both give and take.

Chorus

We're anxious to defend you, but the gods 425
 Now seem determined not to let us fight.

Iolaus

O children, we're like sailors who've set through
 A hurricane and almost reached the shore,
 Only to have the wind veer round and blow
 Us back to sea. And we ourselves are forced 430
 Out of the harbor in that same way, although
 We'd thought that we were safe inside the port.
 O God! How terrible to have a hope
 That charms and cheats you. Still, I know that you
 Are not to blame. I can't expect you to 435
 Kill off your subjects' children. This whole state
 Has done its best. Although the gods see fit
 To treat us this way, still I won't forget.
 I don't know what to do, boys, since we've no
 More refuges to try, and no more gods
 To pray to, no more countries in the world 440

THE HERACLEIDAE

To emigrate to. We're as good as gone.
 The game is up. I don't care for myself,
 Although I hate to let the Argives have
 The joy of killing me; it's you that drive
 Me frantic, and your poor old grandmother,
 Brought down so low at such a time of life!
 But all I've gone through doesn't count at all;
 We're absolutely destined from the start
 To fall and be cut down like animals.

445

Yet maybe you can think of something. I
 Still think there may be some way out; why don't
 You give me up instead of these young boys
 And save their lives without risk to yourself?
 That's it! I've got no cause to hang onto
 My life, and their king would be very pleased
 To catch and torture Heracles' good friend.
 The man's quite low enough. A man with brains
 Had better fight with someone of his class,
 And so get decent treatment when he's down.

455

460

Chorus

Oh please don't put the blame on us. To hear
 Ourselves accused of giving you away
 Sounds ugly, even though it's not deserved.

Demophon

Said like a gentleman, but it won't do.

(To *Iolaus*. *Macaria* enters while he speaks.)

The king's not marching here for you; an old
 Man's not worth bothering about. It's these
 He wants to put out of the way, since, as
 He's very well aware, young nobles with
 A family score to settle can, when they
 Grow up, make matters awkward for him then.
 If you've another plan, let's hear it, since,
 I don't mind telling you, these oracles
 Have got me worried and at my wit's end.

465

470

Macaria

Strangers, before all else, I hope you won't
 Think it was brazen of me to come out.
 I know a woman should be quiet and
 Discreet, and that her place is in the home.
 Yet I came out because I heard your cries. (*Speaking to Iolaus.*)

475

Although I'm not the family head, I have
 A right to be concerned about the fate
 Of my own brothers, and I'd like to know,
 For my sake too, what new thing has turned up
 To plague you—as if this were not enough.

480

Iolaus

I've always thought your family contains
 No cooler head than yours, Macaria.
 The fact is, just when things were going well,
 We suddenly fell downward with a crash,
 Back where we were. The king's priests say he has
 To sacrifice—not just a bull or calf—
 A real live girl, of noble stock, to please
 Persephone, if any of us here
 Values his life. And that's our quandary.
 The king won't kill a stranger's child, much less
 His own, and hinted pretty plainly that
 If we see no way out, we'll have to find
 Another refuge. As for him, he's bound
 To think of his own country's safety first.

485

490

495

Macaria

And on that issue, then, we stand or fall?

Iolaus

All other matters being equal, yes.

Macaria

Then all your Argive fears are over, since
 This volunteer is quite prepared to die,
 And let herself be led off to the slaughter.

500

What could we say if Athens were to court
 This frightful danger just for us, and we
 Left all the brunt to them, and wouldn't help
 Ourselves because we couldn't bear the thought
 Of death. To keep on sniveling like this
 At altars while we show to all the world
 Our cowardice would admirably fit
 Our father's name, or is it like the brave
 To make fools of themselves? I'd sooner see
 This city taken—God forbid—and let
 Myself be caught and have worst come to worst
 To Heracles' own child, and die that way.505
 If I give in and leave here, then how shall
 I look when people ask why trembling slaves
 Like us have come to ask protection there.
 They'll turn us out and say they're not disposed
 To lift a finger for such spineless things.510
 Why, even if I did survive the deaths
 Of my own brothers, I'd have no hope left
 (Though people have been known to sell their friends
 Upon that chance). But who would marry me,
 Or want this friendless girl as mother of
 His sons? To end things now is much to be
 Preferred to *that* shame, even though a girl515
 Not so well-known might well make the other choice.
 Come, lead me to the place where I'm to die.
 Then wreath me and begin whenever you like;
 And go and win the fight. I hereby put
 Myself on record that of my free will
 I volunteer to die for these and for
 Myself. The brave have found no finer prize
 Than leaving life the way it should be done.520
525

Chorus

A girl who gives her own life to save these
 And says such things leaves nothing unsaid.
 No words could be compared to hers; no acts
 Of flesh and blood rank higher than her own.535

Iolaus

There speaks the hero's daughter, Heracles'
 Own child. At any rate, there's no way to
 Mistake *your* family tree. But, though I'm proud
 Of what you've said, your plight goes to my heart.
 Yet there's a better way. You ought to call
 Your sisters and draw lots to choose the one
 Who'll die to save us all. Why, otherwise,
 It isn't fair for you to die this way.

540

Macaria

I *won't* be butchered as a gambling debt.
 No, it *won't* do; there's nothing fine in that.
 But if you'll take me and consent to use
 Me of yourselves, I offer up my life
 For them of my own accord, but *won't* be forced.

545

Iolaus

Wonder of wonders!
 That answer was more splendid than the fine
 One that you made before, if anything;
 And you outdo yourself in pluck and sense.
 I can't tell you to die or not to die,
 Although your death will save your brothers' lives.

550

555

Macaria

Well put. Don't worry, no guilt can attach
 To you, since I myself elect to die.
 Come on; I'd like to have you hold me when
 I die, and cover me up afterward,
 Since now it's time to go to meet the knife,
 If I'm my father's daughter, as I claim.

560

Iolaus

Oh, no, I couldn't bear to watch you die.

Macaria

Then ask the king to let me end my days
 In women's hands, and not the hands of men.

565

THE HERACLEIDAE

Demophon

Poor girl! Of course, I never could forgive
 Myself if I forgot the honors due
 You, and God knows I've cause enough not to:
 Your grit, your honest heart, such courage as
 I've never known a woman show before.
 Well, go ahead and speak to the old man
 And children here, if you've a last request.

570

Macaria

This is goodbye. Please bring my brothers up
 To be as wise as you, no more, no less,
 In all, and I'll be satisfied. I count
 On you to do your loyal best to save
 Them, since we're your brood in a way, and raised
 By your hands, and I'm giving up my prime
 And chance for marriage just to die for them.
 And now I wish to all my brothers here
 The best of everything, and may you win
 The things for which I'm staking my own life.
 Be sure to pay respect to this old man
 And your old grandmother inside as well,
 And these good people. If the gods will let
 You find relief and see your home again,
 Remember to give the girl that saved your lives
 The kind of funeral that she deserves,
 Since she played fair with you and gave hers up.
 These values will sustain me afterward
 As spinster, childless. . . . Afterward: is there
 An afterward? I hope not. If there's *then*
 No end to all our troubles, where do we
 Go on from there—since death itself, they say,
 Supplies the cure for everything that ails?

575

580

585

590

591

Iolaus

As bravest of your sex, be sure that we
 Would never think of failing to pay you

E U R I P I D E S

The highest honors, here and when you're gone.

And so Godspeed, saving the pardon of

600

The goddess in whose hands your life is placed.

(Exit *Macaria*.)

This shock's too much for me, and everything

(*Totters*.)

Is going black. Quick, children, prop me up!

Let me sit down and cover me with these.

To flout the oracle would be the end of all

605

Of us; though this alternative is sad,

Still, it's the lesser evil of the two.

Chorus

STROPHE

In all our ups and downs a wise

Man knows the gods have final say,

Nor can one house monopolize

610

Destiny, but from day to day

Luck pirouettes, and people who

Had conquered stoop, while drudges make

Their fortunes overnight. But you

Cannot get out of it or break

615

Through by chicanery. You'll find

To try's a waste, time out of mind.

ANTISTROPHE

Don't take God's orders lying down

Or fret because *Macaria*'s won

620

A high and durable renown

For kin and country. She's undone,

For doing what will send her through

The ages. A stout heart commands

Its way through pain. In that she's true

625

To everything her father stands

For and her birthright, true as steel.

The brave are gone; the quick must feel.

THE HERACLEIDAE

(Enter Attendant.)

Attendant

Come, children, can you tell where Iolaus 630
And your own grandmother have gone from here?

Iolaus

Why here I am, as far as that's concerned.

Attendant

Reclining, with your head bowed down! What for?

Iolaus

The troubles of those near to me strike home.

Attendant

Well, now you can get up. Look at me, man.

635

Iolaus

I'm old and these old bones have got no strength.

Attendant

But I have news for you, and what news too!

Iolaus

Who are you? Where have I seen you before?

Attendant

I'm Hyllus' servant. Don't you know me yet?

Iolaus

You're a real friend! You're here to save us all?

640

Attendant

Yes, everything is going to be all right.

Iolaus

Alcmene, come on out. It's you I want
To hear the wonderful news this man's brought.

You've worried yourself sick for so long now
About your grandsons' trip. They're back at last.

645

(Enter *Alcmene*.)*Alcmene*

What's wrong? What's causing all this noise that fills
The house? Another Argive to assault
You? Stranger, I warn you. I'm weak, God knows
But I'll fight kidnappers till my last breath,
Or Heracles was not his mother's son.

650

If you so much as lay a hand upon
These children, then you'll have the glory of
Attacking two defenseless oldsters first.

Iolaus

Cheer up. There's nothing of the sort. This man
Is not an Argive come to threaten us.

655

Alcmene

Then why cry out and give the sign of fright?

Iolaus

I only cried out to bring you out here.

Alcmene

That's quite another thing. Who is this man?

Iolaus

He's come to tell you that your grandson's here.

Alcmene

Your glad news makes you welcome, as he is.
But if he *has* arrived, where is he now?
What kept him from accompanying you
And gladdening his old grandmother's heart?

660

Attendant

He's halted, and is drawing up his troops.

Alcmene

Well that, of course, is no concern of mine.

665

Iolaus

It is, though I'm the one to ask details.

Attendant

Well, just what is it that you want to know?

Iolaus

How many men did Hyllus bring with him?

Attendant

Plenty. I couldn't tell you more than that.

Iolaus

And Athens' leaders have been notified?

670

Attendant

Yes, and he's stationed to the left of them.

Iolaus

Why they must be about to start the fight?

Attendant

Yes, victims have been brought forth to be killed.

Iolaus

How far from your lines are the enemy?

Attendant

I saw the Argive king plain as could be.

675

Iolaus

Yes? What's he up to? Drawing up his men?

Attendant

Yes, I should think so, though I heard no news.

E U R I P I D E S

I'm off to my own chiefs; when action starts
I don't intend to leave them in the lurch.

Iolaus

Well, wait for me! That's just the thing! I want
To go and join my friends and help them out.

680

Attendant

Come now, don't talk such rot. It's not like you.

Iolaus

Not like me, is it, to fight for my friends?

Attendant

You'd do no good, unless your looks could kill.

Iolaus

What? I could smash a shield in just like that!

685

Attendant

You might, if you could keep from falling first.

Iolaus

There's not a one that will stand up to me.

Attendant

There, easy now; you're not the man you were.

Iolaus

I'll take on just as many as I did.

Attendant

Your help won't turn the tide in any case.

690

Iolaus

Don't keep me from a thing I'm set to do.

THE HERACLEIDAE

Attendant

To do? You mean to want it done, don't you?

Iolaus

Say what you please, but still I go along.

Attendant

But you're unarmed. How can you face a fight?

Iolaus

I'll use the captured arms which happen to
Be hanging in the temple here. The god
Will get them back if I survive; if not,
He'll never dun me. Go and take them down.
Quick! Bring the gear out here! A stay-at-home
Is a disgrace, that's what he is. He keeps
Out of harm's way and shakes, while others fight.

695

700

(Exit *Attendant*.)

Chorus

The years have left your spirit just
As fiery, in your faded body.
But why must you try so hard to hurt yourself?
It does *our* state no good, if you can't bring
Yourself to act your age and not go off
On useless tangents. No one
Can bring you back your prime again.

705

Alcmene

What lunacy is this? Do you propose
To leave me and the children here alone?

710

Iolaus

War is a man's job. Your work's minding these.

Alcmene

What's to become of me if you should die?..

E U R I P I D E S

Iolaus

The grandsons who are left will tend you then.

Alcmene

Suppose worse comes to worst—my God!—for them?

Iolaus

These others will stand by you, never fear.

715

Alcmene

Then here I put my trust, my last resort.

Iolaus

I'm sure that Zeus is also on your side.

Alcmene

Hm!

It's not for me to criticize Zeus, but
Still he knows best if he's played fair with me.

720

(Re-enter Attendant.)

Attendant

Here is a full and fitting battle outfit;
Be quick and put it on. The fight's at hand.
For above everything the God of Battles
Detests a slacker. If the gear's too heavy,
Go on without it. Once inside the ranks
You can encase yourself; till then I'll carry it.

725

Iolaus

All right, come on; but keep my things all ready.
Now put the spear-shaft into my left hand
And take my right arm so, to guide my steps.

Attendant

Ye gods! Am I to nursemaid you to war?

730

Iolaus

No, but we'll watch our step. To fall's bad luck.

Attendant

If only you could do what you can dream.

Iolaus

Hurry! I can't afford to miss the fight.

Attendant

You are the dawdler, though you think it's I.

Iolaus

But don't you see how very fast I'm walking?

735

Attendant

I see the speed is largely in your mind.

Iolaus

You'll change your tune as soon as I get there.

Attendant

What will you do? I want to see you win.

Iolaus

You'll see me smash clean through somebody's shield.

Attendant

If ever we arrive there, which I doubt.

740

Iolaus

I wish, oh arm of mine, that you could help
 Me as you used to, when with Heracles
 I ravaged Sparta, in my youth and power.
 Then how we'd thrash this king, Eurystheus, now,
 Who hasn't got the pluck to face a fight.
 But fortune always will confer an aura
 Of worth, unworthily; and in this world
 The lucky person passes for a genius.

745

(Exeunt:)

Chorus

STROPHE

We call earth and the all-night span
 Owned by the moon, and on the sun,
 The god that radiates to man,
 To send the word down here. With one
 Voice make the whole sky ring like mad
 To Zeus's own throne, and all the way
 Out to Athena with the glad
 News. As for us, we say:
 For Athens, home, and for the right
 Of refugees, we mean to fight
 With naked steel.

750

755

ANTISTROPHE

A dreadful and appalling thing
 It is, to think that such a great
 Town like Mycenae, threatening,
 Should store up spite against our state.
 But we'd have thoroughly deserved
 Our ample fill of shame and curses
 If, with guest-rights unobserved,
 We gave to Argos' tender mercies
 Their fugitives. Our champion Zeus
 Prizes us, nor will I reduce
 The gods beneath ourselves.

760

765

STROPHE

Mother of our state and Queen!
 Defender and Mistress as well!
 Smash the false attackers' spleen.
 Send their serried spears to hell!
 Our cause is good, and I refuse
 To think that we deserve to lose
 Our native city.

770

775

ANTISTROPHE

We honor the abundant rite
 Of yours, and when the month is done,

THE HERACLEIDAE

In sequent song the young and light
Of foot can dance and chant, as one.
While night brings to the windy hill
The pulse of dance, and girls that fill
The dark with reveling.

780

(Enter another Attendant.)

Attendant

Madam, the news I bring is short and sweet,
Short in the telling, and yet sweet to hear.
We've won and set up a memorial
Hung with a full display of captured arms.

785

Alcmene

How wonderful! This lucky day has set
You free for all time, since you bring such news.
Yet I'm not free myself of one nightmare:
Are all my near and dear ones still alive?

790

Attendant

Alive and well and heroes every one.

Alcmene

And is old Iolaus all right, too?

Attendant

Covered with glory, too, with heaven's help.

Alcmene

What? Has he something to his credit too?

795

Attendant

He's been changed back to a young man again.

Alcmene

Well, of all things! But, first of all, please tell
Us how our soldiers won this victory.

Attendant

I'll give you the whole story here and now.

EURIPIDES

When we had drawn our own troops up and stood 800
 Directly opposite the enemy,
 Hyllus dismounted from his chariot.
 Standing in no-man's land between the two,
 He called to Eurystheus, "What's the use
 Of hurting Athens, king? Why not expose
 Just one man's life, instead of harming your
 Land too? I challenge you to fight it out
 With me alone. If you win, you can take
 The sons of Heracles, and if I do
 I'll win my family seat and honor back." 810
 And all the army madly cheered the thought
 Of Hyllus' pluck and of their own relief.
 But not the audience nor sheer concern
 For his prestige as leader proved enough
 To shame the king there into showing fight. 815
 He didn't dare. And that's the kind of man
 Who wants to capture Heracles' own sons.
 Then Hyllus took his place back in the ranks.
 And when the seers realized that there was
 No hope of ending matters with a duel, 820
 They sacrificed at once, and let the blood
 Flow down the victims' throats, in augury.
 The chiefs got in their chariots; the rest
 Hid ribs with shield-ribs; Demophon cheered on
 His troops in language worthy of his birth. 825
 "Athenians, this earth that bore and raised
 You all, needs you to fight for her today."
 Meantime, the other king implored his men
 Not to shame Argos' or Mycenae's name,
 Until the trumpet call came high and clear.
 And then both sides closed in. The sound of all 830
 Those shields colliding came in one great crash,
 And shrieks and pandemonium broke loose.
 At first their spearmen proved too much for us
 And drove us back; then they gave ground again,
 And it was touch and go. We buckled down
 To fighting at close quarters, hand to hand. 835

THE HERACLEIAE

Men dropped all round as war-cries swept the field.

"Athens, come on." Then "Men of Argos, strike;
Don't let the enemy make fools of us."

840

And we had all that we could do, but with
Great trouble, in the end we broke their ranks.

Then Iolaus, seeing Hyllus rush
By him begged hard to be allowed to get

845

Up on a chariot. Once there, he took
The reins himself and set his course straight for

The Argive king. That much I saw myself.

I'll tell the rest as it was told to me.

Passing Pallene and Athena's hill

He saw Eurystheus' car, and so he prayed

850

To Zeus and Hebe, to get back his youth
For just a day, and take a full revenge.

Then came the most astounding thing of all!

Two stars shone on the yoke. They threw a dark

Cloud over the whole car, and people who

855

Should know say they were Hebe and your own
Great son. Then the haze lifted to disclose

A young fellow with husky biceps, and,

Like a true hero, Iolaus caught

The king's own chariot at Sciron's rocks.

860

He's brought that chief who used to be so high

And mighty back with him, a prisoner

Of war with hands tied up. The lesson of

The thing is very plain. Don't envy men

Because they seem to have a run of luck,

865

Since luck's a nine days' wonder. Wait their end.

Chorus

Give thanks to Zeus, who fought for us. At last
A day on which our worries are removed.

Alcmene

Hail Zeus! You took your time in helping me,

But I'm not less obliged to you for that.

870

And now I know my son is really with

E U R I P I D E S

The gods, although I had my doubts before.
 Children, just think! You're safe from danger now!
 Safe from the king, who's going to die like
 A dog. You'll soon set eyes upon your own
 Country and have the soil that's yours by right
 Beneath your feet. At last you'll worship those
 Gods of your fathers who were banned for you
 While you were poor and homeless. Tell me, though,
 Why didn't Iolaus kill the king? 875
 What's back of it? To me there is no point
 In being kind to captured enemies. 880

Attendant

But it was done for you, so you could see
 Eurystheus in his glory, in our hands.
 It was brute force that brought him in, and not 885
 His own accord, since he'd no heart to see
 Your face, or pay the price for what he'd done.
 And now goodbye. Please don't forget what you
 First said when I began, that you would set
 Me free; since I should think it's best to keep
 Faith in these things. *Noblesse oblige*, you know. 890

(Exit *Attendant.*)

Chorus

STROPHE

There's nothing like the flute's sound when
 We dance and sing and eat our fill
 And love in all its sweetness. Then
 I feel too glad for words and thrill 895
 To see the happy ending for
 Those near my heart, in brief, to see
 Poor devils had good luck in store
 For themselves, thanks to Destiny
 And Change and Time. 900

ANTISTROPHE

I hope we keep along the right
 Road. Up to now we've paid the high

THE HERACLEIDAE

Gods all their due; it takes a quite
 Unbalanced person to deny
 It in the face of all the facts,
 And Zeus himself has verified
 It very clearly in his acts
 Today, in taking down the pride
 Of callous brutes.

905

STROPHE

Your son, Alcmene, never died.
 He rules above, and never set
 His foot in Hades, or inside
 The crematory fire, but met
 The wedding-god and fell in love
 With Hebe, and the two were paid
 The honors due to children of
 Zeus. It was a marriage made
 In heaven's gilded halls.

910

915

ANTISTROPHE

How small a world it is. They say
 That Pallas helped the father in
 The nick of time, and now today
 The children's lives have also been
 Saved by the goddess' own town.
 The pride of that tormentor who
 Ill-used them so was taken down,
 And we'll have nothing more to do
 With ruthlessness and greed.

920

925

(Enter Attendant with Guards bringing in
Eurystheus in chains.)

Attendant

Madame, we're bringing in, as you can see,
 Eurystheus, which must surprise you and
 Was the last thing that *he* expected too.
 He hadn't bargained for this capture at
 Your hands, when he set out from home with such

930

A force, in his insufferable conceit,
 To smash this state. But fate arranged affairs
 Quite otherwise and turned the tables here.
 Hyllus and Iolaus, who were at
 Work raising a memorial to Zeus,
 Told me to bring this man to you and make
 You happy, since there's nothing like the sight
 Of an old enemy down on his luck.

935

940

Alcmene

You brute! So God has punished you at last.
 Come, turn this way! Or haven't you the nerve
 To look your enemies straight in the eye?
 By God, you'll take the orders that you used
 To give us, if you really are the man
 Who piled humiliations upon my
 Poor son. You filthy scum! You made him go
 To hell before he died; you sent him out
 To kill off hydras, lions, not to speak
 Of all the other horrors—it would take
 Too long to tell it all. But as though this
 Were not enough for you; you drove me and
 The children out of temples throughout Greece
 Where we had taken refuge, hounding old
 People and babes in arms until you found
 A country that was free and wouldn't scare.
 And now you'll get what's coming to you, though
 Killing is much too good for you. To pay
 For what you've done would take a thousand deaths.

945

950

955

960

Chorus

Wait! You can't put a man to death like that.

Attendant

What was the use of capturing him then?

Alcmene

Show me a law against his being killed!

THE HERACLEIDAE

Chorus

But the authorities won't stand for it.

Alcmene

You mean they don't like killing enemies?

965

Chorus

Not prisoners of war, at any rate.

Alcmene

And Hyllus, too, agreed with that idea?

Chorus

Do you expect him to defy our laws?

Alcmene

Why, then, we should have killed the man at once.

Chorus

That's when the wrong was done, since he's survived.

970

Alcmene

Why, what's the difference? We'll correct it now.

Chorus

No one will lay a hand upon this man.

Alcmene

No one? Suppose I do. Or don't I count?

Chorus

There'll be a strong reaction if you do.

Alcmene

No one can say that I don't love this city,

But just let someone try to take away

This man from me, now I've got hold of him.

Call me a reckless fool as often as

975

EURIPIDES

You like, and say I don't behave the way
A woman should. I'll kill him all the same.

980

Chorus

We feel for you. God knows that you have cause
Enough to hate this man so terribly.

Eurystheus

Don't think I'm going to grovel to you or
Show the white feather here and beg to save
My skin. In any case, I didn't start
This feud of my accord. I knew quite well
That you're my cousin and that Heracles
Was consequently my own flesh and blood.
I couldn't help myself when heaven took
A hand, and Hera saddled me with this
Scourge in the first place. Once I had estranged
Your son for good and knew the fight was on,
I racked my brains to make things hard for him
And sat up nights to think of ways to beat
And finish off my enemies, and end
The fear that never left me day and night.

985

I didn't underrate your son and knew
His caliber, to give the man his due
For courage, though he was no friend of mine.
But though he'd died, the others kept alive
The spite. I knew the feud was handed down.
That's why I had to try so hard to get
Them killed or exiled, and to plot and plan;
Those tactics meant the only hope for me.
And in my own place, you'd have beaten off
The snarling cubs left by the lion who
Had hated you. Don't try to tell me that
You'd let them stay at peace, in Argos too.
You missed your chance to kill me at the time
When I was willing, so by all Greek laws
My death pollutes the one who strikes me down.
Athens has let me live and knows enough

990

995

1000

1005

1010

THE HERACLEIDAE

To think of piety before revenge.
I rest my case. Remember I was not
Afraid to go, and I'll have blood for blood.
I don't particularly want to die
Or mind it either, and that's how things stand.

1015

Chorus

Take my advice, Alcmene. Let this man
Go, since that's what this city would prefer.

Alcmene

Suppose we kill him—but respect their words?

1020

Chorus

That's fine, but how would you bring that about?

Alcmene

It's simple. All you have to do is let me kill
And let friends call for the body. Far be it
For me to cheat this city of his corpse.
He'll settle his account with me first, though.

1025

Eurystheus

Go on, I won't complain. But since your state
Here wouldn't stoop to kill me, I'll tell you
Of an old oracle of Loxias which
Will help you some day more than you may think.
You'll bury me, just as it stipulates,
Before Athena's own Pallenian shrine,
And as the guest of Athens' soil I'll guard
You and preserve you till the end of time.
But when these children's children march on you
In force, then I'll be their arch-enemy.
That's their idea of thanks, and that's the kind
Of people that you saved. You'll ask why I
Ignored the god and came in the first place.
Because I trusted Hera more and thought
That she'd keep faith. Don't let this woman pour

1030

1035

1040

E U R I P I D E S

Libations and blood-offerings on my tomb.
But in revenge I'll spoil the homecoming
Of these, and so my end will do two things
At once; it helps you, and it will hurt these.

Alcmene

What are you waiting for, to put this man
Out of the way, since as you've heard, it makes
Your city safe from us? He's pointed out
Your wisest course, since your worst enemy
Becomes your best friend, once he's underground.
Take him away, and when you've killed him, throw

1045

1050

(To Guards.)

Him to the dogs, to scotch his last hope that
He can come back and exile me again.

Chorus

That's the solution. Take away this man.
I want to make sure that our kings are cleared
Of all responsibility in this.

1055

(*Exeunt.*)

HIPPOLYTUS

Translated and with an Introduction by

DAVID GRENE

INTRODUCTION TO HIPPOLYTUS

"If it is necessary that I say anything about a woman's excellence," says Pericles in the history of Thucydides, "I could sum it up in the words: great is her renown whose name is least upon the lips of men either for good or for ill." This has sometimes been taken as the general view of women in Athenian society of the fifth century B.C. However, we have only to look at the tragic stage to realize that the audience at least was immensely interested in women and in their place in human society. Aristophanes attacks Euripides as the author in whose plays the perverse, violent, or monstrous woman has a leading place, and he cites Medea, Sthenoboea, and Phaedra in support of the justice of his charge. As far as the importance of feminine roles goes, Euripides' two predecessors are as guilty as he is. Clytemnestra, Cassandra, Queen Atossa, Electra, Tecmessa, Antigone, and Deianeira are among the most crucial and carefully worked characters in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

But it is probably true that the Athenian audience noticed with special interest, either with delight or with repulsion, Euripides' gallery of bad women. Medea, Sthenoboea, and Phaedra are the three singled out by Aristophanes. Both Sthenoboea and Phaedra are examples of incestuous love; in the *Hippolytus*, Euripides apparently had to revise an early version of the play in which Phaedra makes her proposal of love direct to her stepson. In the second version the nurse was invented to act as a go-between, and Phaedra's conscious responsibility for the address to Hippolytus is left in doubt. But Phaedra's passion for Hippolytus is still the center of the piece. It is not necessary to debate whether, to the fifth-cen-

tury Greek, sexual relations between stepmother and stepson would be technically incestuous or not. It is enough that we can be sure that they involved an extreme violation of the trust and affection between father and son, and something worse than that, even if the evil cannot be exactly charted.

The play is framed by a Prologue and an Epilogue, each spoken by a goddess. When these goddesses are identified as Aphrodite and Artemis, it becomes all too easy to allegorize them and see the play as a conflict between Lust and Continence with Phaedra and Hippolytus as the appropriate human representatives. But if this view were correct, surely the point of issue would have to be a conflict where the moral really emerged, where, that is, it was dramatically stated with a fair chance of an outcome in either direction. Hippolytus should be tempted where an ordinary man might fall, and Phaedra yield to a passion which, if blameworthy, is comprehensible. Instead, the monstrousness of the relationship is the hinge on which everything turns. Phaedra, when rejected, must kill herself for shame. Theseus, when he learns of it, is ready to murder his son; Hippolytus, in his defense before his father, says that he is accused of a crime from which even an ordinarily unchaste man would shrink. The truth seems to be that Euripides used a story with an almost Homeric flavor, of rival goddesses and their favorites, to write of the absolute power of passion over the human animal. The more horrible the crime of which she is guilty, the more clear it is that Phaedra is being driven far out of her natural course. The perversity of Hippolytus' ostentatious purity—for so the Greeks certainly regarded it—is the cynical foil to Phaedra's guilty lust. She must fall in love with the one man who is a very monk for continence!

This is certainly the right way to see the play, but the explanation also shows some of the play's weaknesses. The author is deeply concerned with Phaedra—Aristophanes is quite right to see that she is the principal character—and much less with Hippolytus. Consequently, when Phaedra dies, only halfway through the play, Euripides is left to deal with a denouement in which he is only professionally interested, be-

HIPPOLYTUS

cause he must properly tidy up the ends of the story. He does this somewhat mechanically and with a flavor of rhetorical commonplace in the argument between Hippolytus and his father. After the disappearance of Phaedra, he enjoyed himself, one feels, only in writing the messenger's speech, with its exciting account of the young man's death. But the figure of Phaedra and even the nurse's intervention—that dramatist's second thought—and the flimsy ambiguity of motive all remain with us to illustrate what is meant by the statement that Euripides marks the beginning of modern psychological tragedy.

The play was first performed in 428 B.C.

C H A R A C T E R S

Theseus

Hippolytus, his son by the queen of the Amazons
Phaedra, Theseus' wife, stepmother to Hippolytus

A Servant

A Messenger

The Nurse

The Chorus of Palace women, natives of Troezen
A Chorus of huntsmen, in attendance on Hippolytus

The Goddess Aphrodite

The Goddess Artemis

HIPPOLYTUS

SCENE: *Troezen, in front of the house of Theseus.*

PROLOGUE

Aphrodite

I am called the Goddess Cypris:
I am mighty among men and they honor me by many
names.

All those that live and see the light of sun
from Atlas' Pillars to the tide of Pontus
are mine to rule.

Such as worship my power in all humility,
I exalt in honor.

But those whose pride is stiff-necked against me
I lay by the heels.

There is joy in the heart of a God also
when honored by men.

5

Now I will quickly tell you the truth of this story.

Hippolytus, son of Theseus by the Amazon,
pupil of holy Pittheus,
alone among the folk of this land of Troezen has
blasphemed me

10

counting me vilest of the Gods in Heaven.

He will none of the bed of love nor marriage,
but honors Artemis, Zeus's daughter,
counting her greatest of the Gods in Heaven.

15

He is with her continually, this Maiden Goddess, in the
greenwood.

They hunt with hounds and clear the land of wild things,
mortal with immortal in companionship.

I do not grudge him such privileges: why should I? 20

But for his sins against me

I shall punish Hippolytus this day.

I have no need to toil to win my end:

much of the task has been already done.

Once he came from Pittheus' house¹ to the country of

Pandion

that he might see and be initiate in the holy mysteries. 25

Phaedra saw him

and her heart was filled with the longings of love.

This was my work.

So before ever she came to Troezen

close to the rock of Pallas in view of this land, 30

she dedicated a temple to Cypris.

For her love, too, dwelt in a foreign land.

Ages to come will call this temple after him,
the temple of the Goddess established here.

When Theseus left the land of Cecrops,
flying from the guilty stain of the murder of the

Pallantids,

35

condemning himself to a year's exile

1. "Pitheus' house": The historian Pausanias, relating the legend of Hippolytus, says: "King Theseus, when he married Phaedra, daughter of the king of Crete, was in a quandary what to do with Hippolytus, his son by his former mistress, Antiope the Amazon. He did not wish that after his own death Hippolytus should rule the children of his legitimate marriage, nor yet that Hippolytus should be ruled by them, for he loved him. So he sent the boy to be brought up by his grandfather Pittheus, who lived in Troezen and ruled there. Theseus hoped that when Pittheus died, Hippolytus might inherit the kingdom, and thus peace within the family be preserved, Hippolytus governing Troezen, and Phaedra's children holding sway in Athens." "Pandion's country" and "land of Cecrops" both signify Attica. Pandion and Cecrops were early legendary heroes of Attica.

HIPPOLYTUS

he sailed with his wife to this land.
Phaedra groans in bitterness of heart
and the goads of love prick her cruelly,
and she is like to die.

But she breathes not a word of her secret and none of
the servants

40

know of the sickness that afflicts her.

But her love shall not remain thus aimless and unknown.

I will reveal the matter to Theseus and all shall come out.

Father shall slay son with curses—
this son that is hateful to me.

For once the Lord Poseidon, Ruler of the Sea,
granted this favor to Theseus

45

that three of his prayers to the God should find answer.
Renowned shall Phaedra be in her death, but none the less
die she must.

Her suffering does not weigh in the scale so much
that I should let my enemies go untouched
escaping payment of that retribution
that honor demands that I have.

50

Look, here is the son of Theseus, Hippolytus!

He has just left his hunting.

I must go away.

See the great crowd that throngs upon his heels
and shouts the praise of Artemis in hymns!

55

He does not know

that the doors of death are open for him,
that he is looking on his last sun.

SCENE I

(Enter Hippolytus, attended by friends and servants
carrying nets, hunting spears, etc.)

Hippolytus

Follow me singing
the praises of Artemis,
Heavenly One, Child of Zeus,

Artemis!

We are the wards of your care.

60

(The Chorus of huntsmen chant.)

Hail, Holy and Gracious!

Hail, Daughter of Zeus!

Hail, Maiden Daughter of Zeus and Leto!

65

Dweller in the spacious sky!

Maid of the Mighty Father!

Maid of the Golden Glistening House!

Hail!

Maiden Goddess most beautiful of all the Heavenly Host
that lives in Olympus!

70

*(Hippolytus advances to the altar of Artemis and
lays a garland on it, praying.)*My Goddess Mistress, I bring you ready woven
this garland. It was I that plucked and wove it,
plucked it for you in your inviolate Meadow.No shepherd dares to feed his flock within it:
no reaper plies a busy scythe within it:

75

only the bees in springtime haunt the inviolate Meadow.

Its gardener is the spirit Reverence who
refreshes it with water from the river.Not those who by instruction have profited
to learn, but in whose very soul the seed
of Chastity toward all things alike
nature has deeply rooted, they alone
may gather flowers there! the wicked may not.

80

Loved mistress, here I offer you this coronal;
it is a true worshipper's hand that gives it you
to crown the golden glory of your hair.With no man else I share this privilege
that I am with you and to your words
can answer words. True, I may only hear:
I may not see God face to face.

85

HIPPOLYTUS

So may I turn the post set at life's end
even as I began the race.

Servant

King—for I will not call you “Master,” that belongs
to the Gods only—will you take good advice?

Hippolytus

Certainly I will take good advice. I am not a fool.

90

Servant

In men's communities one rule holds good,
do you know it, King?

Hippolytus

Not I. What is this rule?

Servant

Men hate the haughty of heart who will not be
the friend of every man.

Hippolytus

And rightly too:

For haughty heart breeds arrogant demeanor.

Servant

And affability wins favor, then?

95

Hippolytus

Abundant favor. Aye, and profit, too,
at little cost of trouble.

Servant

Do you think
that it's the same among the Gods in Heaven?

Hippolytus

If we in our world and the Gods in theirs
know the same usages—Yes.

Servant

Then, King, how comes it
that for a holy Goddess you have not even
a word of salutation?

Hippolytus

Which Goddess?
Be careful, or you will find that tongue of yours
may make a serious mistake. 100

Servant

This Goddess here
who stands before your gates, the Goddess Cypris.

Hippolytus

I worship her—but from a long way off,
for I am chaste.

Servant

Yet she's a holy Goddess,
and fair is her renown throughout the world.

Hippolytus

Men make their choice: one man honors one God,
and one another.

Servant

Well, good fortune guard you!
if you have the mind you should have. 105

Hippolytus

God of nocturnal prowess is not my God.

Servant

The honors of the Gods you must not scant, my son.

Hippolytus

Go, men, into the house and look to supper.

HIPPOLYTUS

A plentiful table is an excellent thing
after the hunt. And you (*singling out two*) rub down my
horses.

110

When I have eaten I shall exercise them.

For your Cypris here—a long goodbye to her!

(*The old man is left standing alone on the stage.*
He prays before the statue of Aphrodite.)

O Cypris Mistress, we must not imitate
the young men when they have such thoughts as these.

As fits a slave to speak, here at your image

115

I bow and worship. You should grant forgiveness
when one that has a young tempestuous heart
speaks foolish words. Seem not to hear them.
You should be wiser than mortals, being Gods.

120

(*Enter Chorus of women, servants in Phaedra's house.*)

Chorus

STROPHE

There is a rock streaming with water,
whose source, men say, is Ocean,
and it pours from the heart of its stone a spring
where pitchers may dip and be filled.

My friend was there and in the river water
she dipped and washed the royal purple robes,
and spread them on the rock's warm back
where the sunbeams played.

125

It was from her I heard at first
of the news of my mistress' sorrow.

130

ANTISTROPHE

She lies on her bed within the house,
within the house and fever wracks her
and she hides her golden head in fine-spun robes.
This is the third day

135

she has eaten no bread

and her body is pure and fasting.
 For she would willingly bring her life to anchor
 at the end of its voyage
 the gloomy harbor of death.

140

STROPHE

Is it Pan's frenzy that possesses you
 or is Hecate's madness upon you, maid?
 Can it be the holy Corybantes,
 or the mighty Mother who rules the mountains?
 Are you wasted in suffering thus,
 for a sin against Dictynna, Queen of hunters?
 Are you perhaps unhallowed, having offered
 no sacrifice to her from taken victims?
 For she goes through the waters of the Lake²
 can travel on dry land beyond the sea,
 the eddying salt sea.

145

150

ANTISTROPHE

Can it be that some other woman's love,
 a secret love that hides itself from you,
 has beguiled your husband
 the son of Erechtheus
 our sovran lord, that prince of noble birth?
 Or has some sailor from the shores of Crete
 put in at this harbor hospitable to sailors,
 bearing a message for our queen,
 and so because he told her some calamity
 her spirit is bound in chains of grief
 and she lies on her bed in sorrow?

155

160

EPODE

Unhappy is the compound of woman's nature;
 the torturing misery of helplessness,

2. Limnae, the Lake, a district in Laconia, was the center of the worship of Artemis in the Peloponnese. From it she is sometimes called imnaios, or Lady of the Lake.

HIPPOLYTUS

the helplessness of childbirth and its madness
are linked to it for ever.

My body, too, has felt this thrill of pain,
and I called on Artemis, Queen of the Bow;
she has my reverence always
as she goes in the company of the Gods.

165

But here is the old woman, the queen's nurse
here at the door. She is bringing her mistress out.
There is a gathering cloud upon her face.
What is the matter? my soul is eager to know.
What can have made the queen so pale?
What can have wasted her body so?

170

175

SCENE II

(Enter the Nurse, supporting Phaedra.)

Nurse

A weary thing is sickness and its pains!
What must I do now?
Here is light and air, the brightness of the sky.
I have brought out the couch on which you tossed
in fever—here clear of the house.
Your every word has been to bring you out,
but when you're here, you hurry in again.
You find no constant pleasure anywhere
for when your joy is upon you, suddenly
you're foiled and cheated.

180

There's no content for you in what you have
for you're forever finding something dearer,
some other thing—because you have it not.
It's better to be sick than nurse the sick.
Sickness is single trouble for the sufferer:
but nursing means vexation of the mind,
and hard work for the hands besides.
The life of man entire is misery:
he finds no resting place, no haven from calamity.
But something other dearer still than life

185

190

the darkness hides and mist encompasses;
 we are proved luckless lovers of this thing
 that glitters in the underworld: no man
 can tell us of the stuff of it, expounding
 what is, and what is not: we know nothing of it.
 Idly we drift, on idle stories carried.

195

Phaedra (to the servants)

Lift me up! Lift my head up! All the muscles
 are slack and useless. Here, you, take my hands.
 They're beautiful, my hands and arms!
 Take away this hat! It is too heavy to wear.
 Take it away! Let my hair fall free on my shoulders.

200

Nurse

Quiet, child, quiet! Do not so restlessly
 keep tossing to and fro! It's easier
 to bear an illness if you have some patience
 and the spirit of good breeding.
 We all must suffer sometimes: we are mortal.

205

Phaedra

O,
 if I could only draw from the dewy spring
 a draught of fresh spring water!
 If I could only lie beneath the poplars,
 in the tufted meadow and find my rest there!

210

Nurse

Child, why do you rave so? There are others here.
 Cease tossing out these wild demented words
 whose driver is madness.

Phaedra

Bring me to the mountains! I will go to the mountains!
 Among the pine trees where the huntsmen's pack
 trails spotted stags and hangs upon their heels.
 God, how I long to set the hounds on, shouting!

215

And poise the Thessalian javelin drawing it back—
here where my fair hair hangs above the ear—
I would hold in my hand a spear with a steel point.

220

Nurse

What ails you, child? What is this love of hunting,
and you a lady! Draught of fresh spring water!
Here, beside the tower there is a sloping ridge
with springs enough to satisfy your thirst.

225

Phaedra

Artemis, mistress of the Salty Lake,
mistress of the ring echoing to the racers' hoofs,
if only I could gallop your level stretches,
and break Venetian colts!

230

Nurse

This is sheer madness,
that prompts such whirling, frenzied, senseless words.
Here at one moment you're afire with longing
to hunt wild beasts and you'd go to the hills,
and then again all your desire is horses,
horses on the sands beyond the reach of the breakers.
Indeed, it would need to be a mighty prophet
to tell which of the Gods mischievously
jerks you from your true course and thwarts your wits!

235

Phaedra

O, I am miserable! What is this I've done?
Where have I strayed from the highway of good sense?
I was mad. It was the madness sent from some God
that caused my fall.

240

I am unhappy, so unhappy! Nurse,
cover my face again. I am ashamed
of what I said. Cover me up. The tears
are flowing, and my face is turned to shame.
Rightness of judgment is bitterness to the heart.
Madness is terrible. It is better then
that I should die and know no more of anything..

245

Nurse

There, now, you are covered up. But my own body
when will death cover that? I have learned much
from my long life. The mixing bowl of friendship,
the love of one for the other, must be tempered.

250

Love must not touch the marrow of the soul.

255

Our affections must be breakable chains that we
can cast them off or tighten them.

That one soul so for two should be in travail
as I for her, that is a heavy burden.

260

The ways of life that are most fanatical
trip us up more, they say, than bring us joy.
They're enemies to health. So I praise less
the extreme than temperance in everything.

265

The wise will bear me out.

Chorus Leader

Old woman, you are Phaedra's faithful nurse.
We can see that she is in trouble but the cause
that ails her is black mystery to us.
We would like to hear you tell us what is the matter.

270

Nurse

I have asked and know no more. She will not tell me.

Chorus Leader

Not even what began it?

Nurse

And my answer
is still the same: of all this she will not speak.

Chorus Leader

But see how ill she is, and how her body
is wracked and wasted!

Nurse

Yes, she has eaten nothing
for two days now.

275

H I P P O L Y T U S

Chorus Leader

Is this the scourge of madness?
Or can it be . . . that death is what she seeks?

Nurse

Aye, death. She is starving herself to death.

Chorus Leader

I wonder that her husband suffers this.

Nurse

She hides her troubles, swears that she isn't sick.

Chorus Leader

But does he not look into her face and see . . .
a witness that disproves her?

280

Nurse

No, he is gone.

He is away from home, in foreign lands.

Chorus Leader

Why, you must force her then to find the cause
of this mind-wandering sickness!

Nurse

Every means

I have tried and still have won no foot of ground.

But I'll not give up trying, even now.

285

You are here and can in person bear me witness
that I am loyal to my masters always,
even in misfortune's hour.

Dear child, let us both forget our former words.

Be kinder, you: unknit that ugly frown.

For my part I will leave this track of thought:

290

I cannot understand you there. I'll take
another and a better argument.

If you are sick and it is some secret sickness,
here are women standing at your side to help.

But if your troubles may be told to men,
speak, that a doctor may pronounce upon it. 295
So, not a word! Oh, why will you not speak?
There is no remedy in silence, child.
Either I am wrong and then you should correct me:
or right, and you should yield to what I say.
Say something! Look at me! 300

Women, I have tried and tried and all for nothing.
We are as far as ever from our goal.
It was the same before. She was not melted
by anything I said. She would not obey me.

But this you shall know, though to my reasoning
you are more dumbly obstinate than the sea:
If you die, you will be a traitor to your children. 305
They will never know their share in a father's palace.
No, by the Amazon Queen, the mighty rider
who bore a master for your children, one
bastard in birth but true-born son in mind,
you know him well—Hippolytus. . . .
So that has touched you? 310

Phaedra

You have killed me, nurse. For God's sake, I entreat you,
never again speak that man's name to me.

Nurse

You see? You have come to your senses, yet despite that,
you will not make your children happy nor
save your own life besides.

Phaedra

I love my children.
It is another storm of fate that batters me. 315

Nurse

There is no stain of blood upon your hands?

Phaedra

My hands are clean: the stain is in my heart.

Nurse

The hurt comes from outside? Some enemy?

Phaedra

One I love destroys me. Neither of us wills it.

Nurse

Has Theseus sinned a sin against you then?

320

Phaedra

God keep me equally guiltless in his sight!

Nurse

What is this terror urging you to death?

Phaedra

Leave me to my sins. My sins are not against you.

Nurse

Not of my will, but yours, you cast me off.

Phaedra

Would you force confession, my hand-clasping suppliant? 325

Nurse

Your knees too—and my hands will never free you.

Phaedra

Sorrow, nurse, sorrow, you will find my secret.

Nurse

Can I know greater sorrow than losing you?

Phaedra

You will kill me. My honor lies in silence.

Nurse

And then you will hide this honor, though I beseech you? 330

Phaedra

Yes, for I seek to win good out of shame.

Nurse

Where honor is, speech will make you more honorable.

Phaedra

O God, let go my hand and go away!

Nurse

No, for you have not given me what you should.

Phaedra

I yield. Your suppliant hand compels my reverence.

335

Nurse

I will say no more. Yours is the word from now.

Phaedra

Unhappy mother, what a love was yours!

Nurse

It is her love for the bull you mean, dear child?

Phaedra

Unhappy sister, bride of Dionysus!

Nurse

Why these ill-boding words about your kin?

340

Phaedra

And I the unlucky third, see how I end!

Nurse

Your words are wounds. Where will your tale conclude?

Phaedra

Mine is an inherited curse. It is not new.

Nurse

I have not yet heard what I most want to know.

H I P P O L Y T U S

Phaedra

If you could say for me what I must say for myself.

345

Nurse

I am no prophet to know your hidden secrets.

Phaedra

What is this thing, this love, of which they speak?

Nurse

Sweetest and bitterest, both in one, at once.

Phaedra

One of the two, the bitterness, I've known.

Nurse

Are you in love, my child? And who is he?

350

Phaedra

There is a man, . . . his mother was an Amazon. . . .

Nurse

You mean Hippolytus?

Phaedra

You

have spoken it, not I.

Nurse

What do you mean? This is my death.

Women, this is past bearing. I'll not bear
life after this. A curse upon the daylight!

A curse upon this shining sun above us!

I'll throw myself from a cliff, throw myself headlong!

I'll be rid of life somehow, I'll die somehow!

Farewell to all of you! This is the end for me.

355

The chaste, they love not vice of their own will,
but yet they love it. Cypris, you are no God.

You are something stronger than God if that can be. 360
 You have ruined her and me and all this house.

(*The Nurse goes off. The Chorus forms into two half-choruses.*)

First Half-chorus

Did you hear, did you hear
 the queen crying aloud,
 telling of a calamity
 which no ear should hear?

Second Half-chorus

I would rather die
 than think such thoughts as hers. 365

First Half-chorus

I am sorry for her trouble.

Second Half-chorus

Alas for troubles, man-besetting.

First Half-chorus (turning to Phaedra)

You are dead, you yourself
 have dragged your ruin to the light.
 What can happen now in the long
 dragging stretch of the rest of your days?
 Some new thing will befall the house. 370

Chorus (united)

We know now, we know now
 how your love will end,
 poor unhappy Cretan girl!

Phaedra

Hear me, you women of Troezen who live
 in this extremity of land, this anteroom to Argos.
 Many a time in night's long empty spaces

375

H I P P O L Y T U S

I have pondered on the causes of a life's shipwreck.
 I think that our lives are worse than the mind's quality
 would warrant. There are many who know virtue.
 We know the good, we apprehend it clearly. 380
 But we can't bring it to achievement. Some
 are betrayed by their own laziness, and others
 value some other pleasure above virtue.
 There are many pleasures in a woman's life—
 long gossiping talks and leisure, that sweet curse.
 Then there is shame that thwarts us. Shame is of two
 kinds. 385
 The one is harmless, but the other a plague.
 For clarity's sake, we should not talk of "shame,"
 a single word for two quite different things.
 These then are my thoughts. Nothing can now seduce me 390
 to the opposite opinion. I will tell you
 in my own case the track which my mind followed.
 At first when love had struck me, I reflected
 how best to bear it. Silence was my first plan.
 Silence and concealment. For the tongue
 is not to be trusted: it can criticize 395
 another's faults, but on its own possessor
 it brings a thousand troubles.
 Then I believed that I could conquer love,
 conquer it with discretion and good sense.
 And when that too failed me, I resolved to die. 400
 And death is the best plan of them all. Let none of you
 dispute that.
 It would always be my choice
 to have my virtues known and honored. So
 when I do wrong I could not endure to see
 a circle of condemning witnesses.
 I know what I have done: I know the scandal: 405
 and all too well I know that I am a woman,
 object of hate to all. Destruction light
 upon the wife who herself plays the tempter
 and strains her loyalty to her husband's bed
 by dalliance with strangers. In the wives
 410

of noble houses first this taint begins:
 when wickedness approves itself to those
 of noble birth, it will surely be approved
 by their inferiors. Truly, too, I hate
 lip-worshippers of chastity who own
 a lecherous daring when they have privacy.
 O Cypris, Sea-Born Goddess, how can they
 look frankly in the faces of their husbands
 and never shiver with fear lest their accomplice,
 the darkness, and the rafters of the house
 take voice and cry aloud?

415

This then, my friends, is my destruction:
 I cannot bear that I should be discovered
 a traitor to my husband and my children.
 God grant them rich and glorious life in Athens—
 famous Athens—freedom in word and deed,
 and from their mother an honorable name.
 It makes the stoutest-hearted man a slave
 if in his soul he knows his parents' shame.

420

425

The proverb runs: "There is one thing alone
 that stands the brunt of life throughout its course,
 a quiet conscience," . . . a just and quiet conscience
 whoever can attain it.

Time holds a mirror, as for a young girl,
 and sometimes as occasion falls, he shows us
 the ugly rogues of the world. I would not wish
 that I should be seen among them.

430

Chorus Leader

How virtue is held lovely everywhere,
 and harvests a good name among mankind!

(*The Nurse returns.*)

Nurse

Mistress, the trouble you have lately told me,
 coming on me so suddenly, frightened me;
 but now I realize that I was foolish.

435

H I P P O L Y T U S

In this world second thoughts, it seems, are best.
Your case is not so extraordinary,
beyond thought or reason. The Goddess in her anger
has smitten you, and you are in love. What wonder
is this? There are many thousands suffer with you.
So, you will die for love! And all the others, 440
who love, and who will love, must they die, too?
How will that profit them? The tide of love,
at its full surge, is not withstandable.

Upon the yielding spirit she comes gently,
but to the proud and the fanatic heart 445
she is a torturer with the brand of shame.

She wings her way through the air; she is in the sea,
in its foaming billows; from her everything,
that is, is born. For she engenders us
and sows the seed of desire whereof we're born, 450
all we her children, living on the earth.

He who has read the writings of the ancients
and has lived much in books, he knows
that Zeus once loved the lovely Semele;
he knows that Dawn, the bright light of the world, 455
once ravished Cephalus hence to the God's company
for love's sake. Yet all these dwell in heaven.

They are content, I am sure, to be subdued
by the stroke of love.

But you, you won't submit! Why, you should certainly
have had your father beget you on fixed terms 460
or with other Gods for masters, if you don't like
the laws that rule this world. Tell me, how many
of the wise ones of the earth do you suppose
see with averted eyes their wives turned faithless;
how many erring sons have fathers helped 465
with secret loves? It is the wise man's part
to leave in darkness everything that is ugly.

We should not in the conduct of our lives
be too exacting. Look, see this roof here—
these overarching beams that span your house—

could builders with all their skill lay them dead straight?
 You've fallen into the great sea of love
 and with your puny swimming would escape!
 If in the sum you have more good luck than ill,
 count yourself fortunate—for you are mortal.

470

Come, dear, give up your discontented mood.
 Give up your railing. It's only insolent pride
 to wish to be superior to the Gods. 475
 Endure your love. The Gods have willed it so.
 You are sick. Then try to find some subtle means
 to turn your sickness into health again.
 There are magic love charms, spells of enchantment;
 we'll find some remedy for your love-sickness.
 Men would take long to hunt devices out,
 if we the women did not find them first.

480

Chorus Leader

Phaedra, indeed she speaks more usefully
 for today's troubles. But it is you I praise.
 And yet my praise brings with it more discomfort
 than her words: it is bitterer to the ear.

485

Phaedra

This is the deadly thing which devastates
 well-ordered cities and the homes of men—
 that's it, this art of oversubtle words.
 It's not the words ringing delight in the ear
 that one should speak, but those that have the power
 to save their hearer's honorable name.

Nurse

This is high moralizing! What you want
 is not fine words, but the man! Come, let's be done.
 And tell your story frankly and directly.
 For if there were no danger to your life,
 as now there is—or if you could be prudent,
 I never would have led you on so far,

490

495

merely to please your fancy or your lust.
 But now a great prize hangs on our endeavors,
 and that's the saving of a life—yours, Phaedra,
 there's none can blame us for our actions now.

Phaedra

What you say is wicked, wicked! Hold your tongue!
 I will not hear such shameful words again.

Nurse

O, they are shameful! But they are better than
 your noble-sounding moral sentiments. 500
 "The deed" is better if it saves your life:
 than your "good name" in which you die exulting.

Phaedra

For God's sake, do not press me any further!
 What you say is true, but terrible!
 My very soul is subdued by my love
 and if you plead the cause of wrong so well 505
 I shall fall into the abyss
 from which I now am flying.

Nurse

If that is what you think, you should be virtuous.
 But if you are not, obey me: that is next best.
 It has just come to my mind, I have at home 510
 some magic love charms. They will end your trouble;
 they'll neither harm your honor nor your mind.
 They'll end your trouble, . . . only you must be brave. 515

Phaedra

Is this a poison ointment or a drink?

Nurse

I don't know. Don't be overanxious, child,
 to find out what it is. Accept its benefits.

Phaedra

I am afraid of you: I am afraid
that you will be too clever for my good.

Nurse

You are afraid of everything. What is it?

Phaedra

You surely will not tell this to Hippolytus?

520

Nurse

Come, let that be: I will arrange all well.
Only, my lady Cypris of the Sea,
be my helper you. The other plans I have
I'll tell to those we love within the house;
that will suffice.

(*The Nurse goes off.*)

Chorus

STROPHE

Love distills desire upon the eyes,
love brings bewitching grace into the heart
of those he would destroy.

525

I pray that love may never come to me
with murderous intent,
in rhythms measureless and wild.

Not fire nor stars have stronger bolts
than those of Aphrodite sent
by the hand of Eros, Zeus's child.

530

ANTISTROPHE

In vain by Alpheus' stream,
in vain in the halls of Phoebus' Pythian shrine
the land of Greece increases sacrifice.

535

But Love the King of Men they honor not,
although he keeps the keys
of the temple of desire,
although he goes destroying through the world,

540

HIPPOLYTUS

author of dread calamities
and ruin when he enters human hearts.

STROPHE

The Oechalian maiden who had never known
the bed of love, known neither man nor marriage,
the Goddess Cypris gave to Heracles.

545

She took her from the home of Eurytus,
maiden unhappy in her marriage song,
wild as a Naiad or a Bacchanal,
with blood and fire, a murderous hymenaeal!

550

ANTISTROPHE

Ô holy walls of Thebes and Dirce's fountain
bear witness you, to Love's grim journeying:
once you saw Love bring Semele to bed,
lull her to sleep, clasped in the arms of Death,
pregnant with Dionysus by the thunder king.
Love is like a flitting bee in the world's garden
and for its flowers, destruction is in his breath.

555

560

SCENE III

*(Phaedra is standing listening near the central door
of the palace.)*

Phaedra

Women, be silent!

(She listens and then recoils.)

Oh, I am destroyed forever.

565

Chorus Leader

What is there terrible within the house?

Phaedra .

Hush, let me hear the voices within!

Chorus Leader

And I obey. But this is sorrow's prelude.

Phaedra (cries out)

Oh, I am the most miserable of women!

570

(The Chorus Leader and the Chorus babble excitedly among themselves.)

What does she mean by her cries?

Why does she scream?

Tell us the fear-winged word, Mistress, the fear-winged word,

rushing upon the heart.

Phaedra

I am lost. Go, women, stand and listen there yourselves

575

and hear the tumult that falls on the house.

Chorus Leader

Mistress, you stand at the door.

It is you who can tell us best

what happens within the house.

580

Phaedra

Only the son of the horse-loving Amazon,

Hippolytus, cursing a servant maid.

*Chorus Leader*My ears can catch a sound,
but I can hear nothing clear.

585

I can only hear a voice
scolding in anger.*Phaedra*

It is plain enough. He cries aloud against

the mischievous bawd who betrays her mistress' love.

590

Chorus Leader

Lady, you are betrayed!

How can I help you?

What is hidden is revealed.

You are destroyed.

Those you love have betrayed you.

595

Phaedra

She loved me and she told him of my troubles,
and so has ruined me. She was my doctor,
but her cure has made my illness mortal now.

Chorus Leader

What will you do? There is no cure.

Phaedra

I know of one, and only one—quick death.
That is the only cure for my disease.

600

(She retires into the palace through one of the side doors just as Hippolytus issues through the central door, dogged by the Nurse. Phaedra is conceived of as listening from behind her door during the entire conversation between the Nurse and Hippolytus.)

Hippolytus

O Mother Earth! O Sun and open sky!
What words I have heard from this accursed tongue!

Nurse

Hush, son! Someone may hear you.

Hippolytus

You cannot
expect that I hear horror and stay silent.

Nurse

I beg of you, entreat you by your right hand,
your strong right hand, . . . don't speak of this!

605

Hippolytus

Don't lay your hand on me! Let go my cloak!

Nurse

By your knees then, . . . don't destroy me!

Hippolytus

What is this?

Don't you declare that you have done nothing wrong?

Nurse

Yes, but the story, son, is not for everyone.

Hippolytus

Why not? A pleasant tale makes pleasanter telling,
when there are many listeners.

610

Nurse

You will not break your oath to me, surely you will not?

Hippolytus

My tongue swore, but my mind was still unpledged.

Nurse

Son, what would you do?
You'll not destroy your friends?

Hippolytus

"Friends" you say!

I spit the word away. None of the wicked
are friends of mine.

Nurse

Then pardon, son. It's natural
that we should sin, being human.

615

Hippolytus

Women! This coin which men find counterfeit!

Why, why, Lord Zeus, did you put them in the world,

H I P P O L Y T U S

in the light of the sun? If you were so determined
 to breed the race of man, the source of it
 should not have been women. Men might have dedicated 620
 in your own temples images of gold,
 silver, or weight of bronze, and thus have bought
 the seed of progeny, . . . to each been given
 his worth in sons according to the assessment
 of his gift's value. So we might have lived
 in houses free of the taint of women's presence.
 But now, to bring this plague into our homes 625
 we drain the fortunes of our homes. In this
 we have a proof how great a curse is woman.
 For the father who begets her, rears her up,
 must add a dowry gift to pack her off
 to another's house and thus be rid of the load.
 And he again that takes the cursed creature 630
 rejoices and enriches his heart's jewel
 with dear adornment, beauty heaped on vileness.
 With lovely clothes the poor wretch tricks her out
 spending the wealth that underprops his house.
 That husband has the easiest life whose wife 635
 is a mere nothingness, a simple fool,
 uselessly sitting by the fireside.
 I hate a clever woman—God forbid 640
 that I should ever have a wife at home
 with more than woman's wits! Lust breeds mischief
 in the clever ones. The limits of their minds
 deny the stupid lecherous delights.
 We should not suffer servants to approach them, 645
 but give them as companions voiceless beasts,
 dumb, . . . but with teeth, that they might not converse,
 and hear another voice in answer.
 But now at home the mistress plots the mischief,
 and the maid carries it abroad. So you, vile woman, 650
 came here to me to bargain and to traffic
 in the sanctity of my father's marriage bed.
 I'll go to a running stream and pour its waters
 into my ear to purge away the filth.

Shall I who cannot even hear such impurity,
and feel myself untouched, . . . shall I turn sinner? 655
Woman, know this. It is my piety saves you.

Had you not caught me off my guard and bound
my lips with an oath, by heaven I would not refrain
from telling this to my father.

Now I will go and leave this house until
Theseus returns from his foreign wanderings,
and I'll be silent. But I'll watch you close. 660
I'll walk with my father step by step and see
how you look at him, . . . you and your mistress both.
I have tasted of the daring of your infamy.
I'll know it for the future. Curses on you!
I'll hate you women, hate and hate and hate you,
and never have enough of hating. . . .

Some

say that I talk of this eternally, 665
yes, but eternal, too, is woman's wickedness.
Either let someone teach them to be chaste,
or suffer me to trample on them forever.

*(Phaedra comes out from behind the door.
Exit Hippolytus.)*

Phaedra

Bitter indeed is woman's destiny!
I have failed. What trick is there now, what cunning plea 670
to loose the knot around my neck?
I have had justice. O earth and the sunlight!
Where shall I escape from my fate?
How shall I hide my trouble?
What God or man would appear
to bear hand or part in my crime? 675
There is a limit to all suffering and I have reached it.
I am the unhappiest of women.

Chorus

Alas, mistress, all is over now 680
your servant's schemes have failed and you are ruined.

HIPPOLYTUS

(Enter the Nurse.)

Phaedra

This is fine service you have rendered me,
corrupted, damned seducer of your friends!
May Zeus, the father of my fathers' line,
blot you out utterly, raze you from the world
with thunderbolts! Did I not see your purpose,
did I not say to you, "Breathe not a word of this"
which now overwhelms me with shame? But you,
you did not hold back. And therefore I must die
and die dishonored.

685

Enough of this. We have a new theme now.

The anger of Hippolytus is whetted.

He will tell his father all the story of your sin
to my disparagement. He will tell old Pittheus, too.
He will fill all the land with my dishonor.

690

May my curse
light upon you, on you and all the others
who eagerly help unwilling friends to ruin.

Nurse

Mistress, you may well blame my ill-success,
for sorrow's bite is master of your judgment.
But I have an answer to make if you will listen.

695

I reared you up. I am your loyal servant.
I sought a remedy for your love's sickness,
and found, . . . not what I sought.

Had I succeeded, I had been a wise one.

700

Our wisdom varies in proportion to
our failure or achievement.

Phaedra

So, that's enough
for me? Do I have justice if you deal me
my death blow and then say "I was wrong: I grant it."

Nurse

We talk too long. True I was not wise then.

But even from this desperate plight, my child,
you can escape.

705

Phaedra

You, speak no more to me.
You have given me dishonorable advice.
What you have tried has brought dishonor too.
Away with you!
Think of yourself. For me and my concerns
I will arrange all well.

(Exit *Nurse.*)

You noble ladies of Troezen, grant me this,
this one request, that what you have heard here
you wrap in silence.

710

Chorus Leader

I swear by holy Artemis, child of Zeus,
never to bring your troubles to the daylight.

Phaedra

I thank you. I have found one single blessing
in this unhappy business, one alone,
that I can pass on to my children after me
life with an uncontaminated name,
and myself profit by the present throw
of Fortune's dice. For I will never shame you,
my Cretan home, nor will I go to face
Theseus, defendant on an ugly charge,
never—for one life's sake.

715

720

Chorus Leader

What is the desperate deed you mean to do,
the deed past cure?

Phaedra

Death. But the way of it, that
is what I now must plan.

HIPPOLYTUS

Chorus Leader

Oh, do not speak of it!

Phaedra

No, I'll not speak of it. But on this day
when I shake off the burden of this life
I shall delight the Goddess who destroys me,
the Goddess Cypris.

725

Bitter will have been the love that conquers me,
but in my death I shall at least bring sorrow,
upon another, too, that his high heart
may know no arrogant joy at my life's shipwreck;
he will have his share in this my mortal sickness
and learn of chastity in moderation.

730

Chorus

STROPHE

Would that I were under the cliffs, in the secret hiding-
places of the rocks,
that Zeus might change me to a winged bird
and set me among the feathered flocks.

I would rise and fly to where the sea
washes the Adriatic coast,
and to the waters of Eridanus.

735

Into that deep-blue tide,
where their father, the Sun, goes down,
the unhappy maidens weep
tears from their amber-gleaming eyes
in pity for Phaethon.

740

ANTISTROPHE

I would win my way to the coast,
apple-bearing Hesperian coast,
of which the minstrels sing.

Where the Lord of the Ocean
denies the voyager further sailing,
and fixes the solemn limit of Heaven
which Giant Atlas upholds.

745

There the streams flow with ambrosia
by Zeus's bed of love,
and holy earth, the giver of life,
yields to the Gods rich blessedness.

750

STROPHE

O Cretan ship with the white sails,
from a happy home you brought her,
my mistress over the tossing foam, over the salty sea,
to bless her with a marriage unblest.

755

Black was the omen that sped her here,
black was the omen for both her lands,
for glorious Athens and her Cretan home,
as they bound to Munychia's pier
the cables' ends with their twisted strands
and stepped ashore on the continent.

760

ANTISTROPHE

The presage of the omen was true;
Aphrodite has broken her spirit
with the terrible sickness of impious love.
The waves of destruction are over her head,
from the roof of her room with its marriage bed,
she is tying the twisted noose.

765

And now it is around her fair white neck!
The shame of her cruel fate has conquered.
She has chosen good name rather than life:
she is easing her heart of its bitter load of love.

770

775

Nurse (within)

Ho, there, help!
You who are near the palace, help!
My mistress, Theseus' wife, has hanged herself.

Chorus Leader

It is done, she is hanged in the dangling rope.
Our Queen is dead.

HIPPOLYTUS

Nurse (within)

Quick! Someone bring a knife!
Help me cut the knot around her neck.

780

(The Chorus talks among itself.)

First Woman

What shall we do, friends? Shall we cross the threshold,
and take the Queen from the grip of the tight-drawn
cords?

Second Woman

Why should we? There are servants enough within
for that. Where hands are overbusy,
there is no safety.

785

Nurse (within)

Lay her out straight, poor lady.
Bitter shall my lord find her housekeeping.

Third Woman

From what I hear, the queen is dead.
They are already laying out the corpse.

SCENE IV

(Theseus enters.)

Theseus

Women, what is this crying in the house?
I heard heavy wailing on the wind,
as it were servants, mourning. And my house
deigns me no kindly welcome, though I come
crowned with good luck from Delphi.
The doors are shut against me. Can it be
something has happened to my father. He is old.
His life has traveled a great journey,
but bitter would be his passing from our house.

790

795

Chorus Leader

King, it is not the old who claim your sorrow.
Young is the dead and bitterly you'll grieve.

Theseus

My children . . . has death snatched a life away?

*Chorus Leader*Your children live—but sorrowfully, King.
Their mother is dead.

800

*Theseus*It cannot be true, it cannot.
My wife! How could she be dead?*Chorus Leader*

She herself tied the rope around her neck.

*Theseus*Was it grief and numbing loneliness drove her to it,
or has there been some violence at work?*Chorus Leader*I know no more than this. I, too, came lately
to mourn for you and yours, King Theseus.

805

*Theseus*Oh,
Why did I plait this coronal of leaves,
and crown my head with garlands, I the envoy
who find my journey end in misery.

(To the servants within.)

Open the doors! Unbar the fastenings,
that I may see this bitter sight, my wife
who killed me in her own death.

810

(The doors are opened, and Theseus goes inside.

The Chorus in the Orchestra divide again
into half-choruses and chant.)*First Half-chorus*

Woman unhappy, tortured,

HIPPOLYTUS

your suffering, your death,
has shaken this house to its foundations.

Second Half-chorus

You were daring, you who died
in violence and guilt.
Here was a wrestling: your own hand against your life. 815

Chorus (united)

Who can have cast a shadow on your life?

SCENE V

(Enter Theseus.)

Theseus

O city, city! Bitterness of sorrow!
Extremest sorrow that a man can suffer!
Fate, you have ground me and my house to dust,
fate in the form of some ineffable
pollution, some grim spirit of revenge. 820
The file has whittled away my life until
it is a life no more.
I am like a swimmer that falls into a great sea:
I cannot cross this towering wave I see before me. 825

My wife! I cannot think
of anything said or done to drive you to this horrible
death.

You are like a bird that has vanished out of my hand.

You have made a quick leap out of my arms
into the land of Death.

It must be the sin of some of my ancestors in the dim
past 830

God in his vengeance makes me pay now.

Chorus Leader

You are not the only one, King.
Many another as well as you
has lost a noble wife. 835

Theseus

Darkness beneath the earth, darkness beneath the earth!
How good to lie there and be dead,
now that I have lost you, my dearest comrade.

Your death is no less mine.

840

Will any of you
tell me what happened?
Or does the palace keep a flock of you for nothing?

God, the pain I saw in the house!

I cannot speak of it, I cannot bear it.

845

I cannot speak of it, I cannot bear it. I am a dead man.
My house is empty and my children orphaned.

You have left them, you
my loving wife—
the best of wives
of all the sun looks down on or the blazing stars of the
night.

850

Chorus

Woe for the house! Such storms of ill assail it.

My eyes are wells of tears and overrun,
and still I fear the evil that shall come.

855

Theseus

Let her be, let her be:

What is this tablet fastened to her dear hand?

What can she wish to tell me of news?

Have you written begging me to care
for our children or, in entreaty,
about another woman? Sad one, rest confident.

860

There is no woman in the world who shall come to this
house

and sleep by my side.

Look, the familiar signet ring,
hers who was once my wife!

Come, I will break the seals,
and see what this letter has to tell me.

865

H I P P O L Y T U S

(*The Chorus of women speak singly.*)

First Woman

Surely some God
brings sorrow upon sorrow in succession.

Second Woman

The house of our lords is destroyed: it is no more.

870

Third Woman

God, if it so may be, hear my prayer.
Do not destroy this house utterly. I am a prophet:
I can see the omen of coming trouble.

Theseus

Alas, here is endless sorrow upon sorrow.
It passes speech, passes endurance.

875

Chorus Leader

What is it? Tell us if we may share the story.

Theseus

It cries aloud, this tablet, cries aloud,
and Death is its song!

880

Chorus Leader

Prelude of ruin!

Theseus

I shall no longer hold this secret prisoner
in the gates of my mouth. It is horrible,
yet I will speak.

Citizens,

Hippolytus has dared to rape my wife.
He has dishonored God's holy sunlight.

885

(*He turns in the direction of the sea.*)

Father Poseidon, once you gave to me
three curses. . . . Now with one of these, I pray,

kill my son. Suffer him not to escape,
this very day, if you have promised truly.

890

Chorus Leader

Call back your curses, King, call back your curses.
Else you will realize that you were wrong
another day, too late. I pray you, trust me.

Theseus

I will not. And I now make this addition:
I banish him from this land's boundaries.
So fate shall strike him, one way or the other,
either Poseidon will respect my curse,
and send him dead into the House of Hades,
or exiled from this land, a beggar wandering,
on foreign soil, his life shall suck the dregs
of sorrow's cup.

895

Chorus Leader

Here comes your son, and seasonably, King Theseus.
Give over your deadly anger. You will best
determine for the welfare of your house.

900

(Enter Hippolytus with companions.)

Hippolytus

I heard you crying, father, and came quickly.
I know no cause why you should mourn.
Tell me.

(Suddenly he sees the body of Phaedra.)

O father, father—Phaedra! Dead! She's dead!
I cannot believe it. But a few moments since
I left her. . . . And she is still so young.
But what could it be? How did she die, father?
I must hear the truth from you. You say nothing to me?

905

910

When you are in trouble is no time for silence
The heart that would hear everything

HIPPOLYTUS

is proved most greedy in misfortune's hour.
You should not hide your troubles from your friends,
and, father, those who are closer than your friends.

915

Theseus

What fools men are! You work and work for nothing,
you teach ten thousand tasks to one another,
invent, discover everything. One thing only
you do not know: one thing you never hunt for—
a way to teach fools wisdom.

920

Hippolytus

Clever indeed
would be the teacher able to compel
the stupid to be wise! This is no time
for such fine logic chopping.

I am afraid

your tongue runs wild through sorrow.

Theseus

If there were
some token now, some mark to make the division
clear between friend and friend, the true and the false!
All men should have two voices, one the just voice,
and one as chance would have it. In this way
the treacherous scheming voice would be confuted
by the just, and we should never be deceived.

925

930

Hippolytus

Some friend has poisoned your ear with slanderous tales.
Am I suspected, then, for all my innocence?
I am amazed. I am amazed to hear
your words. They are distraught. They go indeed
far wide of the mark!

935

Theseus

The mind of man—how far will it advance?
Where will its daring impudence find limits?

If human villainy and human life
 shall wax in due proportion, if the son
 shall always grow in wickedness past his father,
 the Gods must add another world to this
 that all the sinners may have space enough.

940

Look at this man! He was my son and he
 dishonors my wife's bed! By the dead's testimony
 he's clearly proved the vilest, falsest wretch.
 Come—you could stain your conscience with the
 impurity—
 show me your face; show it to me, your father.

945

You are the veritable holy man!
 You walked with Gods in chastity immaculate!
 I'll not believe your boasts of God's companionship:
 the Gods are not so simple nor so ignorant.
 Go, boast that you eat no meat, that you have Orpheus
 for your king. Read until you are demented
 your great thick books whose substance is as smoke.
 For I have found you out. I tell you all,
 avoid such men as he. They hunt their prey
 with holy-seeming words, but their designs
 are black and ugly. "She is dead," you thought,
 "and that will save me." Fool, it is chiefly that
 which proves your guilt. What oath that you can swear,
 what speech that you can make for your acquittal,
 outweighs this letter of hers? You'll say, to be sure,
 she was your enemy and that the bastard son
 is always hateful to the legitimate line.
 Your words would argue her a foolish merchant
 whose stock of merchandise was her own life
 if she should throw away what she held dearest
 to gratify her enmity for you.

950

955

960

965

Or you will tell me that this frantic folly
 is inborn in a woman's nature; man
 is different: but I know that young men

are no more to be trusted than a woman
 when love disturbs the youthful blood in them.
 The very male in them will make them false.
 But why should I debate against you in words?
 Here is the dead, surest of witnesses.
 Get from this land with all the speed you can
 to exile—may you rot there! Never again
 come to our city, God-built Athens, nor
 to countries over which my spear is king.

970

975

If I should take this injury at your hands
 and pardon you, then Sinis of the Isthmus,
 whom once I killed, would vow I never killed him,
 but only bragged of the deed. And Sciron's rocks
 washed by the sea would call me liar when
 I swore I was a terror to ill-doers.

980

Chorus Leader

I cannot say of any man: he is happy.
 See here how former happiness lies uprooted!

Hippolytus

Your mind and intellect are subtle, father:
 here you have a subject dressed in eloquent words;
 but if you lay the matter bare of words,
 the matter is not eloquent. I am
 no man to speak with vapid, precious skill
 before a mob, although among my equals
 and in a narrow circle I am held
 not unaccomplished in the eloquent art.
 That is as it should be. The demagogue
 who charms a crowd is scorned by cultured experts.
 But here in this necessity I must speak.
 First I shall take the argument you first
 urged as so irrefutable and deadly.
 You see the earth and air about you, father?
 In all of that there lives no man more chaste
 than I, though you deny it.

985

990

995

It is my rule to honor the Gods first
 and then to have as friends only such men
 as do no sin, nor offer wicked service,
 nor will consent to sin to serve a friend
 as a return for kindness. I am no railer
 at my companions. Those who are my friends
 find me as much their friend when they are absent
 as when we are together.

1000

There is one thing that I have never done, the thing
 of which you think that you convict me, father,
 I am a virgin to this very day.

Save what I have heard or what I have seen in pictures, 1005
 I'm ignorant of the deed. Nor do I wish
 to see such things, for I've a maiden soul.
 But say you disbelieve my chastity.

Then tell me how it was *your* wife seduced me:
 was it because she was more beautiful
 than all the other women in the world? 1010

Or did I think, when I had taken her,
 to win your place and kingdom for a dowry
 and live in your own house? I would have been
 a fool, a senseless fool, if I had dreamed it.

Was rule so sweet? Never, I tell you, Theseus,
 for the wise. A man whom power has so enchanted
 must be demented. I would wish to be 1015

first in the contests of the Greeks,
 but in the city I'd take second place
 and an enduring happy life among
 the best society who are my friends.

So one has time to work, and danger's absence
 has charms above the royal diadem. 1020

But a word more and my defense is finished.
 If I had one more witness to my character,
 if I were tried when *she* still saw the light,
 deeds would have helped you as you scanned your friends
 to know the true from the false. But now I swear,

I swear to you by Zeus, the God of oaths, 1025

HIPPOLYTUS

by this deep-rooted fundament of earth,
I never sinned against you with your wife
nor would have wished or thought of it.
If I have been a villain, may I die
unfamed, unknown, a homeless stateless beggar,
an exile! May the earth and sea refuse 1030
to give my body rest when I am dead!
Whether your wife took her own life because
she was afraid, I do not know. I may not speak
further than this.
Virtuous she was in deed, although not virtuous:
I that have virtue used it to my ruin. 1035

Chorus Leader

You have rebutted the charge enough by your oath:
it is a great pledge you took in the God's name.

Theseus

Why, here's a spell-binding magician for you!
He wrongs his father and then trusts his craft,
his smooth beguiling craft to lull my anger. 1040

Hippolytus

Father, I must wonder at this in you.
If I were father now, and you were son,
I would not have banished you to exile! I
would have killed you if I thought you touched my wife.

Theseus

This speech is worthy of you: but you'll not die so. 1045
A quick death is the easiest of ends
for miserable men. No, you'll go wandering
far from your fatherland and beg your way.
This is the payment of the impious man. 1050

Hippolytus

What will you do? You will not wait until
time's pointing finger proves me innocent.
Must I go at once to banishment?

Theseus

Yes, and had I the power,
 your place of banishment would be beyond
 the limits of the world, the encircling sea
 and the Atlantic Pillars.
 That is the measure of my hate, my son.

Hippolytus

Pledges, oaths, and oracles—you will not test them? 1055
 You will banish me from the kingdom without trial?

Theseus

This letter here is proof without lot-casting.
 The ominous birds may fly above my head:
 they do not trouble me.

Hippolytus

Eternal Gods!
 Dare I speak out, since I am ruined now
 through loyalty to the oath I took by you?
 No, he would not believe who should believe
 and I should be false to my oath for nothing. 1060

Theseus

This is more of your holy juggling!
 I cannot stomach it. Away with you!
 Get from this country—and go quickly! 1065

Hippolytus

Where shall I turn? What friend will take me in,
 when I am banished on a charge like this?

Theseus

Doubtless some man who loves to entertain
 his wife's seducers welcoming them at the hearth.

Hippolytus

That blow went home. 1070

HIPPOLYTUS

I am near crying when I think that I
am judged to be guilty and that it is you who are judge.

Theseus

You might have sobbed and snivelled long ago,
and thought of that before when you resolved
to rape your father's wife.

Hippolytus

House, speak for me!
Take voice and bear me witness if I have sinned.

1075

Theseus

You have a clever trick of citing witnesses,
whose testimony is dumb. Here is your handiwork.

(*Points to the body.*)

It, too, can't speak—but it convicts you.

Hippolytus

If I could only find
another *me* to look me in the face
and see my tears and all that I am suffering!

Theseus

Yes, in self-worship you are certainly practiced.
You are more at home there than in the other virtues,
justice, for instance, and duty toward a father.

1080

Hippolytus

Unhappy mother mine, and bitter birth-pangs,
when you gave me to the world! I would not wish
on any of my friends a bastard's birth.

Theseus (to the servants)

Drag him away!
Did you not hear me, men, a long time since
proclaiming his decree of banishment?

1085

Hippolytus

Let one of them touch me at his peril! But you,
you drive me out yourself—if you have the heart!

Theseus

I'll do it, too, unless you go at once.
No, there is no chance that pity for your exile
will steal on my hard heart and make me change.

(*Theseus goes out.*)

Hippolytus

So, I'm condemned and there is no release.
I know the truth and dare not tell the truth.

1090

(*He turns to the statue of Artemis.*)

Daughter of Leto, dearest of the Gods to me,
comrade and partner in the hunt, behold me,
banished from famous Athens.

Farewell, city! Farewell Erechtheus' land!
Troezen, farewell! So many happy times
you knew to give a young man, growing up.
This is the last time I shall look upon you,
the last time I shall greet you.

1095

(*To his companions.*)

Come friends, you are of my age and of this country,
say your farewells and set me on my way.

You will not see a man more innocent—
innocent despite my judge!—condemned to banishment.

1100

(*Hippolytus goes out.*)

Chorus

STROPHE

The care of God for us is a great thing,
if a man believe it at heart:
it plucks the burden of sorrow from him.
So I have a secret hope
of someone, a God, who is wise and plans;

1105

HIPPOLYTUS

but my hopes grow dim when I see
the deeds of men and their destinies.

For fortune is ever veering, and the currents of life are
shifting
shifting, wandering forever.

1110

ANTISTROPHE

This is the lot in life I seek
and I pray that God may grant it me,
luck and prosperity
and a heart untroubled by anguish.
And a mind that is neither false clipped coin,
nor too clear-eyed in sincerity,
that I may lightly change my ways,
my ways of today when tomorrow comes,
and so be happy all my life long.

1115

STROPHE

My heart is no longer clear:
I have seen what I never dreamed,
I have seen the brightest star of Athens,
stricken by a father's wrath,
banished to an alien land.

1120

1125

Sands of the seashore!
Thicket of the mountain!
Where with his pacing hounds
he hunted wild beasts and killed
to the honor of holy Dictynna.

1130

ANTISTROPHE

He will never again mount his car
with its span of Venetian mares,
nor fill the ring of Limnae with the sound of horses'
hoofs.

The music which never slept
on the strings of his lyre, shall be dumb,

1135

shall be dumb in his father's house.
 The haunts of the Goddess Maid
 in the deep rich meadow shall want their crowns.
 You are banished: there's an end
 of the rivalry of maids for your love.

1140

EPODE

But my sorrow shall not die,
 still my eyes shall be wet with tears
 for your heartless doom.
 Sad mother, you bore him in vain:
 I am angry against the Gods.
 Sister Graces, why did you let him go
 guiltless, out of his native land,
 out of his father's house?

1145

1150

But here I see Hippolytus' servant,
 in haste making for the house, his face sorrowful.

SCENE VI

(Enter a Messenger.)

Messenger

Where shall I go to find King Theseus, women?
 If you know, tell me. Is he within doors?

1155

Chorus

Here he is coming out.

Messenger

King Theseus,
 I bring you news worthy of much thought
 for you and all the citizens who live
 in Athens' walls and boundaries of Troezen.

Theseus

What is it? Has some still newer disaster
 seized my two neighboring cities?

1160

Messenger

Hippolytus is dead: I may almost say dead:

HIPPOLYTUS

he sees the light of day still, though the balance
that holds him in this world is slight indeed.

Theseus

Who killed him? I can guess that someone hated him,
whose wife he raped, as he did mine, his father's.

1165

Messenger

It was the horses of his own car that killed him,
they, and the curses of your lips,
the curses you invoked against your son,
and prayed the Lord of Ocean to fulfil them.

Theseus

O Gods—Poseidon, you are then truly
my father! You have heard my prayers.
How did he die? Tell me. How did the beam
of Justice's dead-fall strike him, my dishonoror?

1170

Messenger

We were combing our horses' coats beside the sea,
where the waves came crashing to the shore. And we were
crying

for one had come and told us that our master,
Hippolytus, should walk this land no more,
since you had laid hard banishment upon him.
Then he came himself down to the shore to us,
with the same refrain of tears,
and with him walked a countless company
of friends and young men his own age.

1175

1180

But at last he gave over crying and said:
Why do I rave like this? It is my father
who has commanded and I must obey him.
Prepare my horses, men, and harness them.
There is no longer a city of mine.
Then every man made haste. Before you could say the
words,

1185

EURIPIDES

there was the chariot ready before our master.
 He put his feet into the driver's rings,
 and took the reins from the rail into his hands.
 But first he folded his hands like this and prayed: 1190
 Zeus, let me die now, if I have been guilty!
 Let my father know that he has done me wrong,
 whether I live to see the day or not.

With that, he took the goad and touched the horses. 1195
 And we his servants followed our master's car,
 close by the horses' heads, on the straight road
 that leads to Argos and to Epidaurus.

When we were entering the lonely country
 the other side of the border, where the shore 1200
 goes down to the Saronic Gulf, a rumbling
 deep in the earth, terrible to hear,
 growled like the thunder of Father Zeus.

The horses raised their heads, pricked up their ears,
 and gusty fear was on us all to know,
 whence came the sound. As we looked toward the shore, 1205
 where the waves were beating, we saw a wave appear,
 a miracle wave, lifting its crest to the sky,
 so high that Sciron's coast was blotted out
 from my eye's vision. And it hid the Isthmus
 and the Asclepius Rock. To the shore it came, 1210
 swelling, boiling, crashing, casting its surf around,
 to where the chariot stood.

But at the very moment when it broke,
 the wave threw up a monstrous savage bull.
 Its bellowing filled the land, and the land echoed it, 1215
 with shuddering emphasis. And sudden panic
 fell on the horses in the car. But the master—
 he was used to horses' ways—all his life long
 he had been with horses—took a firm grip of the reins 1220
 and lashed the ends behind his back and pulled
 like a sailor at the oar. The horses bolted:
 their teeth were clenched upon the fire-forged bit.
 They heeded neither the driver's hand nor harness

nor the jointed car. As often as he would turn them
with guiding hand to the soft sand of the shore,
the bull appeared in front to head them off,
maddening the team with terror.

1225

But when in frenzy they charged toward the cliffs,
the bull came galloping beside the rail,
silently following until he brought disaster,
capsizing the car, striking the wheel on a rock.

1230

Then all was in confusion. Axles of wheels,
and lynch-pins flew up into the air,
and he the unlucky driver, tangled in the reins,
was dragged along in an inextricable
knot, and his dear head pounded on the rocks,
his body bruised. He cried aloud and terrible
his voice rang in our ears: Stand, horses, stand!
You were fed in my stables. Do not kill me!
My father's curse! His curse! Will none of you
save me? I am innocent. Save me!

1235

1240

Many of us had will enough, but all
were left behind in the race. Getting free of the reins,
somehow he fell. There was still life in him.
But the horses vanished and that ill-omened monster,
somewhere, I know not where, in the rough cliffs.

1245

I am only a slave in your household, King Theseus,
but I shall never be able to believe
that your son was guilty, not though the tribe of women
were hanged for it, not though the weight of tablets
of a high pine of Ida, filled with writing,
accused him—for I know that he was good.

1250

Chorus Leader

It has been fulfilled, this bitter, new disaster,
for what is doomed and fated there is no quittance.

1255

Theseus

For hatred of the sufferer I was glad

E U R I P I D E S

at what you told me. Still, he was my son.
As such I have reverence for him and the Gods:
I neither rejoice nor sorrow at this thing.

1260

Messenger

What is your pleasure that we do with him?
Would you have him brought to you? If I might counsel,
you would not be harsh with your son—now he is
unfortunate.

Theseus

Bring him to me that I may see his face.
He swore that he had never wronged my wife.
I will refute him with God's punishing stroke.

1265

Chorus

Cypris, you guide men's hearts
and the inflexible
hearts of the Gods and with you
comes Love with the flashing wings,
comes Love with the swiftest of wings. 1270
Over the earth he flies
and the loud-echoing salt-sea.
He bewitches and maddens the heart
of the victim he swoops upon.
He bewitches the race of the mountain-hunting
lions and beasts of the sea,
and all the creatures that earth feeds,
and the blazing sun sees—
and man, too—
over all you hold kingly power,
Love, you are only ruler 1275
over all these.

1275

1280

EPILOGUE

Artemis

I call on the noble king, the son of Aegeus,
to hear me! It is I, Artemis, child of Leto.

1285

HIPPOLYTUS

Miserable man, what joy have you in this?
You have murdered a son, you have broken nature's
laws.

Dark indeed was the conclusion
you drew from your wife's lying accusations,
but plain for all to see is the destruction
to which they led you.

There is a hell beneath the earth: haste to it, 1290
and hide your head there! Or will you take wings,
and choosing the life of a bird instead of man
keep your feet from destruction's path in which they
tread?

Among good men, at least, you have no share in life. 1295
Hear me tell you, Theseus, how these things came to pass.
I shall not better them, but I will give you pain.
I have come here for this—to show you that your son's
heart

was always just, so just that for his good name
he endured to die. I will show you, too,
the frenzied love that seized your wife, or I may call it, 1300
a noble innocence. For that most hated Goddess,
hated by all of us whose joy is virginity,
drove her with love's sharp prickings to desire
your son. She tried to overcome her love
with the mind's power, but at last against her will,
she fell by the nurse's stratagems, 1305
the nurse, who told your son under oath her mistress
loved him.

But he, just man, did not fall in with her
counsels, and even when reviled by you
refused to break the oath he had pledged.

Such was his piety. But your wife fearing
lest she be proved the sinner wrote a letter, 1310
a letter full of lies; and so she killed
your son by treachery; but she convinced you.

Theseus

Alas!

Artemis

This is a bitter story, Theseus. Stay,
hear more that you may groan the more.
You know you had three curses from your father, 1315
three, clear for you to use? One you have launched,
vile wretch, at your own son, when you might have
spent it upon an enemy. Your father,
King of the Sea, in loving kindness to you
gave you, by his bequest, all that he ought.
But you've been proved at fault both in his eyes 1320
and mine in that you did not stay for oaths
nor voice of oracles, nor gave a thought
to what time might have shown; only too quickly
you hurled the curses at your son and killed him.

Theseus

Mistress, I am destroyed.

Artemis

You have sinned indeed, but yet you may win pardon. 1325
For it was Cypris managed the thing this way
to gratify her anger against Hippolytus.
This is the settled custom of the Gods:
No one may fly in the face of another's wish:
we remain aloof and neutral. Else, I assure you, 1330
had I not feared Zeus, I never would have endured
such shame as this—my best friend among men
killed, and I could do nothing.
As for you, in the first place ignorance acquits you,
and then your wife, by her death, destroyed the proofs, 1335
the verbal proofs which might have still convinced you.
You and I are the chief sufferers, Theseus.
Misfortune for you, grief for me.
The Gods do not rejoice when pious worshippers die: 1340
the wicked we destroy, children, house and all.

Chorus

Here comes the suffering Hippolytus,

HIPPOLYTUS

his fair young body and his golden head,
a battered wreck. O trouble of the house,
what double sorrow from the hand of God
has been fulfilled for this our royal palace!

1345

Hippolytus

A battered wreck of body! Unjust father,
and oracle unjust—this is your work.
Woe for my fate!

1350

My head is filled with shooting agony,
and in my brain there is a leaping fire.
Let me be!

For I would rest my weary frame awhile.

Curse on my team! How often have I fed you
from my own hand, you who have murdered me!
O, O!

1355

In God's name touch my wounded body gently.

Who is this standing on the right of me?

1360

Come lift me carefully, bear me easily,
a man unlucky, cursed by my own father
in bitter error. Zeus, do you see this,
see me that worshipped God in piety,
me that excelled all men in chastity,
see me now go to death which gapes before me;
all my life lost, and all for nothing now
labors of piety in the face of men?

1365

O the pain, the pain that comes upon me!

1370

Let me be, let me be, you wretches!

May death the healer come for me at last!

You kill me ten times over with this pain.

O for a spear with a keen cutting edge
to shear me apart—and give me my last sleep!
Father, your deadly curse!

1375

This evil comes from some manslaying of old,
some ancient tale of murder among my kin.

1380

But why should it strike me, who am clear of guilt?

What is there to say? How can I shake from me

1385

this pitiless pain? O death, black night of death,
resistless death, come to me now the miserable,
and give me sleep!

Artemis

Unhappy boy! You are yoked to a cruel fate.
The nobility of your soul has proved your ruin.

1390

Hippolytus

O divine fragrance! Even in my pain
I sense it, and the suffering is lightened.
The Goddess Artemis is near this place.

Artemis

She is, the dearest of the Gods to you.

Hippolytus

You see my suffering, mistress?

1395

Artemis

I see it. Heavenly law forbids my tears.

Hippolytus

Gone is your huntsman, gone your servant now.

Artemis

Yes, truly: but you die beloved by me.

Hippolytus

Gone is your groom, gone your shrine's guardian.

Artemis

Cypris, the worker of mischief, so contrived.

1400

Hippolytus

Alas, I know the Goddess who destroyed me!

Artemis

She blamed your disrespect, hated your chastity.

H I P P O L Y T U S

Hippolytus

She claimed us three as victims then, did Cypris?

Artemis

Your father, you, and me to make a third.

Hippolytus

Yes, I am sorry for my father's suffering.

1405

Artemis

Cypris deceived him by her cunning snares.

Hippolytus

O father, this is sorrow for you indeed!

Theseus

I, too, am dead now. I have no more joy in life.

Hippolytus

I sorrow for you in this more than myself.

Theseus

Would that it was I who was dying instead of you!

1410

Hippolytus

Bitter were Poseidon's gifts, my father, bitter.

Theseus

Would that they had never come into my mouth.

Hippolytus

Even without them, you would have killed me—
you were so angry.

Theseus

A God tripped up my judgment.

Hippolytus

O, if only men might be a curse to Gods!

1415

Artemis

Hush, that is enough! You shall not be unavenged,
 Cypris shall find the angry shafts she hurled
 against you for your piety and innocence
 shall cost her dear.

I'll wait until she loves a mortal next time,
 and with this hand—with these unerring arrows
 I'll punish him. 1420

To you, unfortunate Hippolytus,
 by way of compensation for these ills,
 I will give the greatest honors of Troezen.
 Unwedded maids before the day of marriage 1425
 will cut their hair in your honor. You will reap
 through the long cycle of time, a rich reward in tears.
 And when young girls sing songs, they will not forget you,
 your name will not be left unmentioned,
 nor Phaedra's love for you remain unsung. 1430

(To *Theséus*.)

Son of old Aegeus, take your son
 to your embrace. Draw him to you. Unknowing
 you killed him. It is natural for men
 to err when they are blinded by the Gods.

(To *Hippolytus*.)

Do not bear a grudge against your father. 1435
 It was fate that you should die so.
 Farewell, I must not look upon the dead.
 My eye must not be polluted by the last
 gaspings for breath. I see you are near this.

Hippolytus

Farewell to you, too, holy maiden! Go in peace. 1440
 You can lightly leave a long companionship.
 You bid me end my quarrel with my father,
 and I obey. In the past, too, I obeyed you.

The darkness is upon my eyes already.

Father, lay hold on me and lift me up. 1445

H I P P O L Y T U S

Theseus

Alas, what are you doing to me, my son?

Hippolytus

I am dying. I can see the gates of death.

Theseus

And so you leave me, my hands stained with murder.

Hippolytus

No, for I free you from all guilt in this.

Theseus

You will acquit me of blood guiltiness?

1450

Hippolytus

So help me Artemis of the conquering bow!

Theseus

Dear son, how noble you have proved to me!

Hippolytus

Yes, pray to heaven for such legitimate sons.

Theseus

Woe for your goodness, piety, and virtue.

Hippolytus

Farewell to you, too, father, a long farewell!

1455

Theseus

Dear son, bear up. Do not forsake me.

Hippolytus

This is the end of what I have to bear.

I'm gone. Cover my face up quickly.

Theseus

Pallas Athene's famous city,
what a man you have lost! Alas for me!

1460

Cypris, how many of your injuries
I shall remember.

Chorus

This is a common grief for all the city;
it came unlooked for. There shall be
a storm of multitudinous tears for this;
the lamentable stories of great men
prevail more than of humble folk.

1465

THE CYCLOPS

Translated and with an Introduction by

WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

INTRODUCTION TO CYCLOPS*

Interest in Euripides' *Cyclops* is generally justified historically: other than a chunk of Sophocles' *Ichneutae*, it is the only example of a satyr-play, that ribald piece which in the dramatic festivals crowned a group of three tragedies or a tragic trilogy. But the *Cyclops* is more than historically interesting; it is, by modern standards, good fast farce, clearly stageworthy, with a fine dramatic intelligence behind it. The movement is typically Euripidean, not merely in the sharp reversal of roles and sympathies, the crisp dialogue and the consistent anachronization, but in formal structure and underlying idea as well. Moreover, despite the play's sportive obscenity and knockabout humor, its underlying idea is essentially serious. The *Cyclops*, that is, may be clearly a farce, but it is primarily a farce of ideas, a gay and ironic flirtation with the problem of civilized brutality. As such, it lies within the main stream of Euripides' tragic thought, and, if its treatment and tone differ from that of tragedy, the difference is less a difference of dramatic quality or genius than a difference of genre.

We should like to know a great deal more about satyr-drama as a genre than we do, and we should especially like to know what in fifth-century practice was the formal connection between a satyr-play and the three tragedies which preceded it. But unfortunately the *Cyclops* is undated and cannot, with any degree of certainty, be assigned to one of the extant tragedies.¹ In the absence of that crucial information, it be-

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1. The most tempting suggestion has been, I think, that the

comes difficult to speak with assurance of the formal nature of the play or to generalize from it to the formal definition of fifth-century satyr-drama. Indeed, even if we possessed the requisite information, the very distance which separates the tragedy of Euripides from that of Aeschylus and Sophocles would tend by analogy to preclude a generalization about satyr-plays. One ancient writer, it is true, speaks of satyr-drama as being "tragedy-at-play" or "joking tragedy."² But this is hardly helpful, since it may mean either that satyr-drama was mock tragedy, or tragedy *buffa*, or pure farce, or simply a sportive treatment of the subject matter of tragedy. All of these are possibilities applicable to the *Cyclops*, but we have no evidence which might allow us to decide among them.

In point of origins the satyr-play, like both comedy and tragedy, was closely bound up with Dionysiac fertility ritual. Even in the fifth century satyr-drama in its frequent obscenity, its conventional use of Silenus as "nurse" and companion of Dionysus, and its chorus of satyrs with their *phalloi* preserves more vividly than tragedy the memory of its origins. What the original connection between tragedy and comedy and "satyr" may have been, we do not know, though Aristotle in a much disputed passage asserts that the satyr-play was one of the early stages of tragedy;³ but the value of the testimony appears

Cyclops should be assigned to a group of three tragedies of which the extant *Hecuba* was one. (The *Hecuba* is dated, on very good grounds, almost certainly to 425 B.C.) The assignment is strengthened not merely by topical considerations (cf. E. Delebecque, *Euripide et la guerre du Péloponnèse*) but by very close formal resemblances between the two plays. Thus the blinding of Polyphemus parallels the blinding of Polymnestor, and Polyphemus' final appearance from the cave vividly recalls Polymnestor's emergence from the tent. In both plays again, the guiding idea is that of civilized brutality, and in both cases a barbaric vengeance is taken upon a barbarian (Polymnestor, Polyphemus) by a "civilized" person (Hecuba, Odysseus). The final prophecies again closely parallel each other, and the portrayal of Odysseus in the *Hecuba* is given a great deal of point if we have in mind the sequel in *Cyclops*. In the dovetailing of actions and the reversal of roles, the two plays are strikingly similar.

2. Demetrius of Phalerum *De interp.* 169; cf. Horace *Ars poetica* 231-33.

3. *Poetics* 1449^a 9 ff.

doubtful.⁴ On the whole, scholars have preferred to believe that both satyr-drama and tragedy are independent developments of Dionysiac ritual and that satyr-drama was probably adopted by the dramatist Pratinas from a Peloponnesian source and attached to the Attic festivals. Alternatively, it is held that the double aspect of Dionysiac ritual—mourning for the dead god and joyous celebration at his resurrection—accounts for the connection between tragedy and the satyr-play. On this theory tragedy contains the *agon* of the dying god, while the satyr-play, like comedy, exhibits the happy celebration for the reborn god and the ritual of the sacred marriage and rounds off the complete drama of the rite in a sportive coda. The presence in the *Cyclops* of an attenuated *komos* and a hinted mock (male) marriage between Silenus and Polyphemus offers some slight evidence for the theory. But it is this very attenuation of the ritual element in the play that reminds us that a theory of formal origins does not really explain what we need to know—the *literary* use and the meaning of the developed form. An account of origins may perhaps explain the conventions of a given form, but it will seldom explain the conscious literary deployment of those conventions.

For the rest our information is tantalizingly slight. Thus we know that the satyr-plays were briefer than the tragedies (the *Cyclops* is the shortest of extant plays); they had their own peculiar choral dance, the *sikinnis*, and they allowed, in prosody and diction, a very slight relaxation from tragic standards in the direction of colloquial speech. For its material satyr-drama drew upon the same sources in myth and *epos* as tragedy. Thus the *Oresteia* appears to have been followed by the *Proteus*, a satyr-play dealing with Menelaus' Egyptian adventure with the Old Man of the Sea, while the *Cyclops* is a conflation of the Polyphemus episode from the ninth book of the *Odyssey* with the story of the capture of Dionysus by Lydian pirates.⁵ Both the chorus of satyrs and its “father”

4. Cf. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (Oxford, 1927), p. 124.

5. Cf. *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*.

Silens form a standard part of satyric convention, and their characters are accordingly stylized: the satyrs are boisterous, childlike "horse-men" (*not* "goat-men") with a strong streak of cowardice, while Silenus is at every point the ancestor of Falstaff—lewd, fat, bald, drunken, boastful, knavish, and foolish. Finally, it needs to be stressed that, however comic a satyr-play may seem, it is not to be confounded with Greek comedy, which differs from it not only in its material (usually free invention or mythological burlesque), but in structure, conventions, and the degree of topicality and license.

In plot and detail Euripides' adaptation of his Homeric material is remarkably close. If Odysseus here does not escape from the cave by clinging to a ram's belly, and if the immense boulder which in Homer blocked the cave has here been rolled away, these are clearly alterations demanded by the necessities of theatrical presentation. In Euripides the Cyclops is still the creature of his belly, a barking barbarian, and Odysseus is still in some sense the shrewd and civilized man who manages by exercise of mother wit to mutilate the man-eating monster and escape. Or so, at least, it might seem if we possessed only the first half of the play. But the *Cyclops* is not merely a dramatic retelling of Homer; rather, it is Homer's parable of the civilized man and the savage systematically anachronized into its fifth-century equivalent, an altogether different parable.

Neither Odysseus nor Polyphemus is really Homeric at all. Odysseus is not the type of the civilized man, and the Euripidean Cyclops, like the United States in Wilde's epigram, has passed directly from barbarism to decadence without pause for civilization. Both manifest late fifth-century types of corruption: Odysseus' Homeric heroism in its new context is systematically undercut, less heroism than a transparent vain-glory and depraved eloquence; Polyphemus is less Caliban than Calicles, an outright exponent of philosophical egoism and the immoralist equation of might and right. Euripides has taken considerable pains, moreover, to indicate to his audience that this is no longer Homer's world, but their own. Thus, when Odysseus first appears, he is greeted by Silenus

THE CYCLOPS

as a "glib sharper" and "son of Sisyphus." Now, whatever Odysseus may be in Homer, he is never merely a "glib sharper," and his father is Laertes, not Sisyphus. To an audience bred on Homer the distinction is revealing: at one blow Euripides deprives Odysseus of his Homeric paternity in order to attach him to Sisyphus, the proverbial type of cheat and thief, and thereby warns his audience of what they may expect. Odysseus is in fact the familiar depraved politician of the *Hecuba*, the *Trojan Women*, and the *Iphigeneia at Aulis*; he stands, as he almost always does in tragedy, for that refinement of intellect and eloquence which makes civilized brutality so much more terrible than mere savagery. In the *Cyclops*, however, he is on the defensive, and there is irony in the reversal of roles as the man who refused mercy and *nomos* to Hecuba must now himself plead for it. If we sympathize with Odysseus at first, this initial sympathy is nonetheless quickly alienated by the sheer, otiose brutality of his revenge and by Polyphemus' transformation into a drunken, almost lovable, buffoon. The gory description of the Cyclops' cannibalism may perhaps justify Odysseus' revenge, but it does not thereby redeem its barbaric cruelty. Just as the full action of the *Hecuba* consists in reducing both Hecuba and the barbarian Polymnestor to a common subhuman cruelty, so the *Cyclops* shows, not the distinction, but the identity, between Odysseus and Polyphemus.

Odysseus' speech for *nomos* and mercy is the crux of the play. As Silenus recognizes, the speech is pure sophistry, but the sophistry has important consequences that we need to examine. The difficulty lies in the thoroughness of the anachronization and the allusions to the sanctions and background of the Peloponnesian War.

It opens with a disclaimer of responsibility for the Trojan War: "A god was responsible; don't blame men." Such disclaimers in Euripides normally operate to damn those who make them, as, for instance, Helen's disavowal of responsibility in the *Trojan Women*. The next argument sounds very strange indeed. The Greeks, Odysseus argues, have preserved the temples of Poseidon (father of Cyclops) and saved Hellas;

therefore the Cyclops, who is Greek because he lives in Greek Sicily (another anachronism), should spare Odysseus and his men. What we have here is a covert but unmistakable allusion to the Persian Wars, when Athens claimed to have saved Hellas and the ancestral gods from the Persians. There is irony in the claim that it was piety which saved the silver-mines of Laurium on Cape Sunium (where there happened to be a shrine to Poseidon), but the larger irony is somewhat more complex.

What Odysseus is urging here is nothing more or less than the argument which Athens had used to acquire her empire: Athens had saved Hellas and should have the rewards of her deed. This sanction for empire was employed down to the time of the Peloponnesian War to coerce neutrals and unwilling states into the Athenian orbit, and the sanction was as loathsome to most Greeks as the Athenian Empire. Herodotus, writing in the forties, is so much aware of the unpopularity of Athens and her sanction that he is reluctant to state the real truth which underlies the sanction—Athens *did* save Hellas. In 432 B.C., just before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, the unofficial Athenian envoys at Sparta could say of their empire:

We have a fair claim to our possessions. . . . We need not refer to remote antiquity . . . but to the Persian War and contemporary history we must refer, although we are rather tired of continually bringing this subject forward.⁶

By 416, the Athenian generals at Melos could argue naked imperialism; the empire had outgrown its sanction:

We shall not trouble you with specious pretences . . . either of how we have a right to our empire because we overthrew the Persians, or are now attacking you because of wrong that you have done us . . . since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.⁷

6. Thuc. i. 73. 2 ff.

7. *Ibid.* v. 89.

THE CYCLOPS

This, then, is the sanction Odysseus urges, and it is one whose irony it would be difficult for his audience to miss. The irony lies in the fact that an argument normally used to deny mercy to others is here being used to obtain it. When it fails before the Cyclops' massive egoism, Odysseus resorts to the ultimate argument of the weak, law and civilized custom (*nomos*). In so doing he joins Thucydides' Plataeans and Melians, as well as his own victim Hecuba. And, like Hecuba, failing to receive *nomos*, he finally resorts to a revenge utterly unsanctioned by any civilized standards, *anomos*. The speech closes on an overt reference to the cost of human suffering in the Peloponnesian War. And here, as so often in Euripides, the really serious argument is put in the mouth of a man who is not qualified to make it, or who contradicts it in his actions. The contradiction lies in the inverted use of the imperialistic sanction and the implied indifference to human suffering in other circumstances.

If Odysseus speaks in part the language of the Athenian imperialists and in part the language of the Melians, the Cyclops outdistances him by far. Devoid of respect for the gods, his religion is his belly and his right his desires. He speaks exactly the language of Plato's Thrasymachus and Callicles, a straightforward egoism resting on an appeal to Nature for the disregard of morality. *Nomos*, so far as he is concerned, is a mere convention of the weak to elude the strong. In the contrast, then, of Polyphemus and Odysseus we have no Homeric contrast of barbarism and cool, civilized intelligence, but a juxtaposition of two related types of civilized brutality whose difference is merely that of circumstance, one being weak, the other strong. It is because neither Cyclops nor Odysseus has any genuine moral dignity, because both of them are shown as effectively brutal and corrupt, that the bloody blinding of Polyphemus can come as close to pathos as it does without becoming any less comic.

The ending is in fact superbly controlled. As usual in Euripides, the sympathy invoked for one character is suddenly alienated and shifted to another; the victim and the oppressor change places. Polyphemus, from being first a Homeric can-

E U R I P I D E S

nibal and then a Euripidean Callicles, is suddenly turned into a decadent, rather likable buffoon who loathes war, understands generosity, and tipsily "rapes" Silenus. Odysseus makes his bid for glory by blinding this cannibal oaf while he sleeps drunkenly. The shift in sympathy is not decisive, because no real principle is involved; but it is not therefore illusory. Odysseus' action is contemptible, but not quite criminal; Polyphemus gets what he deserves, but we pity him. That we are meant to view the action in this way seems clear both in Polyphemus' final prophecy of trouble for Odysseus and in Odysseus' statement that he would have done wrong had he burned Troy but not avenged his men. Whatever his rights in avenging his men may be, they are not sanctioned by the burning of Troy, an action which the Cyclops condemns, and with him Euripides. The truth is that Odysseus and the Cyclops deserve, not justice, but each other. The *Cyclops* in its seriousness and its humor plays about a struggle for justice between two men who either distort justice or deny its existence and who cannot therefore meaningfully claim it when wronged. And yet they get it.

C H A R A C T E R S

Silens

Chorus of satyrs

Coryphaeus, or chorus-leader

Odysseus

Cyclops, called Polyphemus

Members of Odysseus' crew

Slaves

THE CYCLOPS

SCENE: An enormous cave at the foot of Mt. Etna. In the foreground, a slope of pasture; on the right, a small brook. Silenus comes out of the cave to speak the prologue. He is old, fat, and bald. A horse's tail hangs down his legs. He wears a filthy tunic and carries a rake.

Silenus

O Bromios,

thanks to you, my troubles are as many now
as in my youth when my body still was strong!
First I remember when Hera drove you mad
and you left your nurses, the mountain nymphs.
And then there was that war with the Giants:
there I stood, on your right, covering your flank
with my spear. And I hit Enceladus
square on the button of his shield and killed him.
Or wait: was that in a dream? No, by Zeus,
for I showed the very spoils to Bacchus.
And now I must bail against a wilder wave
of trouble. For when I heard that Hera
had pricked on those Lydian pirates to sell you
as a slave abroad, I hoisted sail with my sons
to search for you. Right on the stern I stood,
the tiller in my hands, steering the ship.
And my boys strained at the oars, churning white
the green sea in our search for you, my king!
And then we had almost made Malea

5

10

15

when an east wind cracked down and drove us here,
to rocky Etna, where the one-eyed sons
of the sea-god, the murderous Cyclopes,
live in their desolate caves. One of them—
they call him Polyphemus—captured us
and made us slaves in his house. So now,
instead of dancing in the feasts of Bacchus,
we herd the flocks of this godless Cyclops.

20

Down at the foot of the mountain, my sons—
young men all of them—watch the youngling herd.
I am assigned to stay and fill the troughs
and clean the quarters and play the chef
for the loathsome dinners of the Cyclops.
And now I must scour the cave with this rake—
these are my orders—to welcome back home
my absent master and his flock of sheep.

25

30

35

(*He halts suddenly, turns to the left and looks. A confused hubbub, mingled with singing, offstage.*)

But I see my sons shepherding their sheep
this way. What? (*Shouts.*) How can you dance like that?
Do you think you're mustered at Bacchus' feast
and mincing your lewd way with lyre-music
to the halls of Althaea?

40

(*Preceded by a flute-player and driving their herds before them, the chorus of satyrs bounds into the orchestra. Except for short goatskin jerkins, they are naked. About their waists they wear belts—skin-colored—to each of which is fixed, in front, a phallus, and in the rear, a horse's tail. They do a series of fast and intricate steps as they push the stubborn rams, coax the ewes, and round up the strays.*)

Chorus

(*To a ewe who dashes for the slope.*)

THE CYCLOPS

STROPHE

You there, with the fine pedigree
on both sides, dam and sire,
 why run for the rocks?
Haven't you here a quiet breeze,
 green grass for the grazing?
Look: the water from the brook
 beside the cave
 swirls through your troughs
 and the small lambs bleat.

45

(*To an obstinate ram.*)

Hey, you too? Are you off as well
to crop on the dew on the hill?
Move, or I'll pelt you with stones!
In with you, horny-head, move along
into the fold of Shepherd Cyclops!

50

(*To a stubborn ewe.*)

ANTISTROPHE

Relieve your swollen teats!
Come, suckle your young whom you left
 all alone in the lamb-pens!
Asleep all day, your new-born lambs
 bleat that they want you.
Leave your cropping and into the fold,
 into the rocks of Etna!

55

60

[Hey, you too? Are you off as well
to crop on the dew on the hill?
Move, or I'll pelt you with stones!
In with you, horny-head, move along
into the fold of Shepherd Cyclops!]

EPODE

No Bacchus here! Not here the dance,
or the women whirling the *thyrsos*,
or the timbrels shaken,
 where the springs rill up!

65

Not here the gleam of wine,
and no more at Nysa with nymphs,
crying *Iacchos! Iacchos!*

Where is Aphrodite? . . .

70

she that I used to fly after
along with the bare-footed Bacchae!
Dear lord Bacchus, where do you run,
tossing your auburn hair?

75

For I, your servant, am a wretched slave,
tricked out in dirty goatskin
to serve a one-eyed Cyclops,
and out of the way, lord, of your love.

80

(*Silenus, who has been scanning anxiously the horizon on the right, turns suddenly, his finger on his lips.*)

Silenus

Be quiet, my sons. Quick, order the slaves
to corral the flocks into the rock-fold.

Coryphaeus

Move along there.

(*Slaves appear and hustle the animals into the cave.*)

But why this hurry, father?

Silenus

I see a Greek ship drawn up on the shore
and oarsmen led by a captain coming
toward our cave. They carry water-pitchers
and empty containers about their necks:
they'll want supplies. Poor strangers, who are they?

85

They can't know our master Polyphemus,
coming like this to the man-eater's cave
and looking for a welcome in his maw.

90

But hush, so we can learn from where they've come,
and why, to Sicily and Mt. Etna.

95

THE CYCLOPS

(*Odysseus appears on the right. He carries a sword. A wine-flask made of skin is suspended from his neck; a cup is attached to the cord. He is followed by crew-members carrying pitchers and jugs.*)

Odysseus

Strangers, could you tell us where we might find
running water? We have nothing to drink.
Would some one of you like to sell some food
to hungry sailors? *What?* Do I see right?
We must have come to the city of Bacchus.
These are satyrs I see around the cave. 100
Let me greet the oldest among you first.

Sileneus

Greeting, stranger. Who are you, and from where?

Odysseus

I am Odysseus of Ithaca, king of the Cephallenians.

Sileneus

I've heard of you: a glib sharper, Sisyphus' bastard.

Odysseus

I am he. Keep your abuse to yourself. 105

Sileneus

From what port did you set sail for Sicily?

Odysseus

We come from Troy and from the war there.

Sileneus

What? Couldn't you chart your passage home?

Odysseus

We were driven here by wind and storm.

Sileneus

Too bad. I had the same misfortune. 110

Odysseus

You too were driven from your course by storm?

Sileneus

We were chasing the pirates who captured Bacchus.

Odysseus

What is this place? Is it inhabited?

Sileneus

This is Etna, the highest peak in Sicily.

Odysseus

Where are the walls and the city-towers?

115

Sileneus

This is no city. No man inhabits here.

Odysseus

Who does inhabit it? Wild animals?

Sileneus

The Cyclopes. They live in caves, not houses.

Odysseus

Who governs them? Or do the people rule?

Sileneus

They are savages. There is no government.

120

Odysseus

How do they live? Do they till the fields?

Sileneus

Their whole diet is milk, cheese, and meat.

Odysseus

Do they grow grapes and make the vine give wine?

THE CYCLOPS

Silenum

No. The land is sullen. There is no dance.

Odysseus

Are they hospitable to strangers here?

125

Silenum

Strangers, they say, make excellent eating.

Odysseus

What? You say they feast on human flesh?

Silenum

Here every visitor is devoured.

Odysseus

Where is this Cyclops now? In the . . . house?

Silenum

Gone hunting on Mt. Etna with his packs.

130

Odysseus

What should we do to make our escape?

Silenum

I don't know, Odysseus. We'll do what we can.

Odysseus

Then sell us some bread. We have none left.

Silenum

There is nothing to eat, I said, except meat.

Odysseus

Meat is good, and it will stop our hunger.

135

Silenum

We do have fig-cheese. And there is milk.

Odysseus

Bring it out. The buyer should see what he buys.

Sileneus

Tell me, how much are you willing to pay?

Odysseus

In money, nothing. But I have some . . . wine.

Sileneus

Delicious word! How long since I've heard it.

140

Odysseus

Maron, son of a god, gave me this wine.

Sileneus

Not the same lad I once reared in these arms?

Odysseus

The son of Bacchus himself, to be brief.

Sileneus

Where is the wine? on board ship? you have it?

Odysseus

In this flask, old man. Look for yourself.

145

Sileneus

That? That wouldn't make one swallow for me.

Odysseus

No? For each swallow you take, the flask gives two.

Sileneus

A fountain among fountains, that! I like it.

Odysseus

Will you have it unwatered to start with?

260

T H E C Y C L O P S

Silenus

That's fair. The buyer should have a sample.

150

Odysseus

I have a cup here to go with the flask.

Silenus

Pour away. A drink will joggle my memory.

Odysseus

(*Unstoppers the flask, pours out a cup and waves it under Silenus' nose.*)

There you are.

Silenus

Mmmmmmm. Gods, what a bouquet!

Odysseus

Can you *see* it?

Silenus

No, by Zeus, but I can whiff it.

Odysseus

Have another. Then you'll *sing* its praises.

155

Silenus

Mmmmmmmaa. A dance for Bacchus! La de da.

Odysseus

Did that purl down your gullet sweetly?

Silenus

Right down to the tips of my toenails.

Odysseus

Besides the wine, we'll give you money.

160

Silenus

Money be damned! Just pour out the wine.

261

Odysseus

Then bring out your cheese, or some lambs.

Silens

Right away.

I don't give a hoot for any master.

I would go mad for one cup of that wine!

I'd give away the herds of all the Cyclopes.

165

Once I get drunk and happy, I'd go jump
in the sea off the Leucadian rock!

The man who doesn't like to drink is mad.

Why, when you're drunk, you stand up stiff down here

(Gestures.)

and then get yourself a fistful of breast

170

and browse on the soft field ready to your hands.

You dance, and goodbye to troubles. Well then,

why shouldn't I adore a drink like that

and be damned to the stupid Cyclops

with his eye in the middle?

(He enters the cave.)

Coryphaeus

Listen, Odysseus, we'd like a word with you.

175

Odysseus

By all means. We are all friends here.

Coryphaeus

Did you take Helen when you took Troy?

Odysseus

We rooted out the whole race of Priam.

*Coryphaeus*When you took that woman, did you all take turns
and bang her? She liked variety in men,
the fickle bitch! Why, the sight of a man
with embroidered pants and a golden chain

180

so fluttered her, she left Menelaus,
a fine little man. I wish there were
no women in the world—except for me.

185

(*Silenus reappears from the cave, his arms loaded with wicker panniers of cheese; he leads some lambs.*)

Silenus

King Odysseus, here are some lambs for you,
the fat of the flock, and here, a good stock
of creamed cheeses. Take them and leave the cave
as fast as you can. But first give me a drink
of that blessed wine to seal our bargain.
Help us! Here comes the Cyclops! What shall we do?

190

Odysseus

We're finished now, old man. Where can we run?

Silenus

Into the cave. You can hide in there.

195

Odysseus

Are you mad? Run right into the trap?

Silenus

No danger. The rocks are full of hiding-places.

Odysseus

(*Grandiloquently.*)

Never. Why, Troy itself would groan aloud
if we ran from one man. Many's the time
I stood off ten thousand Phrygians with my shield.
If die we must, we must die with honor.
If we live, we live with our old glory!

200

(*The satyrs run pell-mell around the orchestra; Silenus slinks into the cave. On the left appears a bearded man of great height. He holds a club and is followed by dogs.*)

Cyclops

Here. Here. What's going on? What's this uproar?
 Why this Bacchic hubbub? There's no Bacchus here,
 no bronze clackers or rattling castanets!

205

How are my newborn lambs in the cave?

Are they at the teat, nuzzling their mothers?

Are the wicker presses filled with fresh cheese?

Well? What do you say? Answer, or my club

210

will drub the tears out of you! Look up, not down.

Coryphaeus

There. We're looking right up at Zeus himself.

I can see Orion and all the stars.

Cyclops

Is my dinner cooked and ready to eat?

Coryphaeus

Ready and waiting. You have only to bolt it.

215

Cyclops

And are the vats filled up, brimming with milk?

Coryphaeus

You can swill a whole hogshead, if you like.

Cyclops

Cow's milk, or sheep's milk, or mixed?

Coryphaeus

Whatever you like. Just don't swallow me.

Cyclops

You least. I'd soon be dead if I had you
 jumping through your capers in my belly.

220

(*He suddenly sees the Greeks standing near the cave.*)

Hey! what's that crowd I see over by the cave?

Have pirates or thieves taken the country?

Look: sheep from my fold tied up with withies!

225

THE CYCLOPS

And cheese-presses all around! And the old man
with his bald head swollen red with bruises!

*(Silenus emerges from the cave, groaning; he is
red-faced from the wine.)*

Silenus

Ohhh. I'm all on fire. They've beaten me up.

Cyclops

Who did? Who's been beating your head, old man?

Silenus

(Indicating the Greeks.)

They did, Cyclops. I wouldn't let them rob you.

230

Cyclops

Didn't they know that I am a god?
Didn't they know my ancestors were gods?

Silenus

I tried to tell them. But they went on robbing.
I tried to stop them from stealing your lambs
and eating your cheeses. What's more, they said
they would yoke you to a three-foot collar
and squeeze out your bowels through your one eye,
and scourge your backsides with a whip,
and then they were going to tie you up
and throw you on a ship and give you away
for lifting rocks or for work at a mill.

235

240

Cyclops

Is that so? Run and sharpen my cleavers.
Take a big bunch of faggots and light it.
I'll murder them right now and stuff my maw
with their meat hot from the coals. Why wait
to carve? I'm fed up with mountain food:
too many lions and stags and too long
since I've had a good meal of manmeat.

245

265

Sileneus

And quite right, master. A change in diet
is very pleasant. It's been a long time
since we've had visitors here at the cave.

250

Odysseus

Cyclops, let your visitors have their say.
We came here to your cave from our ship
because we needed food. This fellow here
sold us some lambs in exchange for wine—
all quite voluntary, no coercion.
There's not a healthy word in what he says;
the fact is he was caught peddling your goods.

255

260

Sileneus

I? Why, damn your soul.

Odysseus

If I'm lying. . . .

Sileneus

I swear, Cyclops, by your father Poseidon,
by Triton the great, I swear by Nereus,
by Calypso and by Nereus' daughters,
by the holy waves and every species of fish,
I swear, dear master, sweet little Cyclops,
I did not sell your goods to the strangers!
If I did, then let my dear children die for it.

265

Coryphaeus

And the same to you. With these very eyes
I saw you selling goods to the strangers.
And if I'm lying, then let my father
die for it. But don't do wrong to strangers.

270

Cyclops

You're lying. I would rather believe him

(*He indicates Sileneus.*)

266

THE CYCLOPS

than Rhadamanthus himself. And I say
that he's right. But I want to question you.
Where have you come from, strangers? where to?
And tell me in what city you grew up.

275

Odysseus

We are from Ithaca. After we sacked
the city of Troy, sea-winds drove us here,
safe and sound, to your country, Cyclops.

Cyclops

Was it you who sacked Troy-on-Scamander
because that foul Helen was carried off?

280

Odysseus

We did. Our terrible task is done.

Cyclops

You ought to die for shame: to go to war
with the Phrygians for a single woman!

Odysseus

A god was responsible; don't blame men.
But we ask as free men, we implore you,
do not, O noble son of the sea-god,
murder men who come to your cave as friends.
Do not profane your mouth by eating us.

285

(*He waxes rhetorical.*)

For it is we, my lord, who everywhere
in Hellas preserved your father Poseidon
in the tenure of his temples. Thanks to us,
Taenarus' sacred harbor is inviolate;
the peak of Sunium with its silver-lodes
sacred to Athena, is still untouched;
and safe, the sanctuaries of Geraestus!
We did not betray Greece—perish the thought!—
to Phrygians. And you have a share in this:

295

for this whole land, under volcanic Etna
in whose depths you live, is part of Hellas.

(*The Cyclops shows disapproval.*)

In any case—and if you disagree—
all men honor that custom whereby
shipwrecked sailors are clothed and protected. 300
Above all, they should not gorge your mouth and paunch,
nor be spitted as men might spit an ox.
The land of Priam has exhausted Greece,
soaked up the blood of thousands killed in war: 305
wives made widows, women without their sons,
old men turned snow-white. If you roast the rest
for your ungodly meal, where will Hellas turn?
Change your mind, Cyclops! Forget your hunger!
Forget this sacrilege and do what is right. 310
Many have paid the price for base profits.

Silenus

A word of advice, Cyclops. If you eat
all of his flesh and chew on his tongue,
you'll become eloquent and very glib. 315

Cyclops

Money's the wise man's religion, little man.
The rest is mere bluff and purple patches.
I don't give a damn for my father's shrines
along the coast! Why did you think I would?
And I'm not afraid of Zeus's thunder; 320
in fact, I don't believe Zeus is stronger
than I am. And anyway I don't care,
and I'll tell you why I don't care. When Zeus
pours down rain, I take shelter in this cave
and feast myself on roast lamb or venison. 325
Then I stretch myself and wash down the meal,
flooding my belly with a vat of milk.
Then, louder than ever Zeus can thunder,
I fart through the blankets. When the wind sweeps down

THE CYCLOPS

with snow from Thrace, I wrap myself in furs
and light up the fire. Then let it snow
for all I care! Whether it wants or not,
the earth must grow the grass that feeds my flocks.

330

And as for sacrifices, I make mine,
not to the gods, but the greatest god of all,
this belly of mine! To eat, to drink
from day to day, to have no worries—
that's the real Zeus for your clever man!

335

As for those who embroider human life
with their little laws—damn the lot of them!

340

I shall go right on indulging myself—
by eating you. But, to be in the clear,
I'll be hospitable and give you fire
and my father's water—plus a cauldron.
Once it starts to boil, it will render down
your flesh very nicely. So, inside with you,
and gather round the altar to the god
of the cave, and wish him hearty eating.

345

(*Cyclops enters the cave, driving Odysseus' crew
before him.*)

Odysseus

Gods! Have I escaped our hardships at Troy
and on the seas only to be cast up
and wrecked on the reef of this savage heart?

O Pallas, lady, daughter of Zeus, now
if ever, help me! Worse than war at Troy,
I have come to my danger's deepest place.

350

O Zeus, god of strangers, look down on me
from where you sit, throned among the bright stars!
If you do not look down upon me now,
you are no Zeus, but a nothing at all!

355

(*He disappears into the cave; Silenus follows him.*)

Chorus

Open the vast O of your jaws, Cyclops!

Dinner is served: the limbs of your guests,
boiled, roasted, or broiled, ready for you
to gnaw, rend, and chew
while you loll on your shaggy goatskin.

360

Don't ask me to dinner. Stow that cargo
on your own. Let me keep clear of this cave,
well clear of the Cyclops of Etna,
this loathsome glutton,

365

who gorges himself on the guts of his guests!

Savage! Stranger to mercy! A monster
who butchers his guests on his hearth,
who boils up their flesh and bolts it,
whose foul mouth munches

370

on human meat plucked from the sizzling coals!

(*Odysseus appears from the cave.*)

Odysseus

Zeus, how can I say what I saw in that cave?
Unbelievable horrors, the kind of things
men do in myths and plays, not in real life!

375

Coryphaeus

Has that god-forsaken Cyclops butchered
your crew? Tell us what happened, Odysseus.

Odysseus

He snatched up two of my men, the soundest
and heaviest. He weighed them in his hands.

380

Coryphaeus

How horrible! How could you stand to watch?

Odysseus

First, after we had entered the cave,
he lit a fire and tossed down on the huge hearth
logs from a vast oak—you would have needed

THE CYCLOPS

three wagons merely to carry the load. 385
 Then he pulled his pallet of pine-needles
 close to the fire. After he milked the sheep,
 he filled a hundred-gallon vat with milk.
 By his side, he put an ivy-wood box,
 nearly four feet in width and six feet deep. 390
 Next he put a cauldron of brass to boil
 on the fire, and beside it thorn-wood spits
 whose points had been sharpened in the coals
 and the rest trimmed down with an axe. There were
 bowls for catching blood, big as Etna,
 and set flush against the blade of the axe. 395
 Well, when this damned cook of Hades was ready,
 he snatched up two of my men. With one blow
 he slit the throat of one over the lip
 of the brass cauldron. Holding the other
 by the heels, he slammed him against a rock
 and bashed out his brains. Then he hacked away 400
 the flesh with his terrible cleaver
 and put the pieces to roast on the coals.
 The leftovers he tossed in the pot to boil.
 With the tears streaming down, I went up close 405
 and waited on the Cyclops. The others,
 their faces ashen, huddled up like birds
 in the crannies of the rocks. Then he leaned back,
 bloated with his awful meal on my men,
 and let out a staggering belch. Just then 410
 some god sent me a marvelous idea!
 I filled a cup and gave him Maron's wine
 to drink. "Cyclops," I said, "son of the sea-god,
 see what a heavenly drink yield the grapes
 of Greece, the gladness of Dionysus!" 415
 Glutted with his dreadful meal, he took it
 and drained it off at one gulp, then lifted
 his hands in thanks: "You are the best of guests!
 You have given me a noble drink to crown
 a noble meal." When I saw how pleased he was, 420
 I poured him another, knowing the wine

would quickly fuddle him and pay him back.
Then he started to sing. I poured one drink
after another and warmed his belly.

So there he is, inside, singing away
while my crew wails; you can hear the uproar.
I slipped quietly out. Now, if you agree,
I'd like to save myself and you as well.

So tell me, yes or no, whether you want
to escape this monster and live with the nymphs
in the halls of Bacchus. Your father in there
agrees, but he's weak and loves his liquor.
He's stuck to the cup as though it were glue,
and can't fly. But you are young, so follow me
and save yourselves; find again your old friend,
Dionysus, so different from this Cyclops!

425

430

435

Coryphaeus

My good friend, if only we might see that day
when we escape at last this godless Cyclops!

(*Showing his phallus.*)

This poor hose has been a bachelor
a long time now. But we can't eat the Cyclops *back!*

440

Odysseus

Listen to my plan for setting you free
and our revenge upon this loathsome beast.

Coryphaeus

Tell on. I would rather hear tell of his death
than hear all the harps in Asia play.

Odysseus

He is so delighted with Bacchus' drink
he wants to carouse with his relatives.

445

Coryphaeus

I see. You'll set an ambush in the woods
and kill him—or push him over a cliff.

THE CYCLOPS

Odysseus

No, I had something more subtle in mind.

Coryphaeus

I thought from the first you were sly. What then?

450

Odysseus

I hope to stop his going on this spree
by saying he shouldn't give his wine away,
but keep it for himself and live in bliss.

Then, as soon as the wine puts him to sleep,
I'll take my sword and sharpen up the trunk
of an olive tree I saw inside the cave.

I'll put it in the coals and when it's caught,
I'll shove it home, dead in the Cyclops' eye,
and blind him. Just like a timber-fitter
whirling his auger around with a belt,

I'll screw the brand in his eye, round and round,
scorch out his eyeball and blind him for good.

455

460

Coryphaeus

Bravo! I'm for your plan with all my heart.

465

Odysseus

And finally, my friends, I'll embark you
and your old father aboard my black ship
and sail full speed away from this place.

Coryphaeus

May I lend a hand at this ritual?
Help hold the pole when you put out his eye?
This is one sacrifice I want to share.

470

Odysseus

You must. The brand is huge. You all must lift.

Coryphaeus

I could shoulder a hundred wagon-loads

so long as Cyclops died a wretched death!
We'll smoke out his eye like a hornets' nest.

475

Odysseus

Be quiet now. You know my stratagem.
When I give the word, obey your leaders.
I refuse to save myself and leave my men
trapped inside. I could, of course, escape:
here I am, outside. But I have no right
to abandon my crew and save myself alone.

480

(*He enters the cave.*)

Chorus

Who'll be first along the brand? Who next?
We'll shove it square in the Cyclops' eyel!
We'll rip away his sight.

485

Quiet.

Shhhh.

(*Polyphemus appears from the cave flanked by Odysseus and Silenus. Odysseus carries the flask and cup, while Silenus holds a pitcher and a mixing-bowl.*)

Here he comes, flat, off-key drunkard,
reeling out of his home in the rock,
braying some wretched tune. Ha!
We'll give him lessons in carousing!

490

(*Polyphemus stumbles blindly about.*)

A little while: then, perfect blindness!

First semichorus

Happy the man who cries *Evohé!*
stretched out full length and making merry,
for whom the wine keeps flowing,
whose arms are open to his friend!
Lucky man, upon whose bed there blows

495

THE CYCLOPS

the soft bloom of a lovely girl
with gleaming hair, sweet with oil!
who cries: "Who'll open me the door?"

500

Cyclops

Mamama. Am I crammed with wine!
How I love the fun of a feast!
The hold of my little dory
is stuffed right up to the gunwales!
This marvelous meal reminds me:
I should go feast in the soft spring
with my brothers, the Cyclopes.
Here, here, my friend, hand me the flask.

505

510

Second semichorus

O the flash of a handsome Eye!
Handsome himself comes from his house,
Handsome the groom, Handsome the lover!
A soft bride burns for this groom;
she burns in the cool of the cave!
And soon we shall wreath his head
with a wreath of reddest flowers!

515

Odysseus

Listen, Cyclops. I've spent a lot of time
with this drink of Bacchus I gave you.

520

Cyclops

What sort of god is this Bacchus held to be?

Odysseus

Best of all in blessing the lives of men.

Cyclops

(*Belching.*)

At least he makes very tasty belching.

Odysseus

That's the kind of god he is: hurts no one.

Cyclops

How can a god bear to live in a flask?

525

Odysseus

Wherever you put him, he's quite content.

Cyclops

Gods shouldn't shut themselves up in wine-skins.

Odysseus

What matter, if you like him? Does the flask irk you?

Cyclops

I loathe the flask. The wine is what I like.

Odysseus

Then you should stay here and enjoy yourself.

530

Cyclops

Shouldn't I share the wine with my brothers?

Odysseus

Keep it to yourself; you'll be more esteemed.

Cyclops

But I'd be more useful if I shared it.

Odysseus

Yes, but carousing often ends in fights.

Cyclops

I'm so drunk nothing could hurt me now.

535

Odysseus

My dear man, drunkards ought to stay at home.

Cyclops

But the man's a fool who drinks by himself.

T H E C Y C L O P S

Odysseus

It's the wise man who stays home when he's drunk.

Cyclops

What should we do, Silenus? Should I stay home?

Silensu

I would. Why do we want more drinkers, Cyclops?

540

Cyclops

(*Yawning.*)

Anyway, the ground is soft and the flowers. . . .

Silensu

There's nothing like a drink when the sun is hot.
Lie down there; stretch yourself out on the ground.

(*Cyclops obediently lies down, and furtively Silenus puts the bowl behind his back.*)

Cyclops

There. Why did you put the bowl behind my back?

545

Silensu

Someone might tip it over.

Cyclops

You wanted
to steal a drink. Put it in the middle.
You there, stranger, tell me what your name is.

Odysseus

"Nobody" is my name. But how will you reward me?

Cyclops

I will eat you the last of all your crew.

550

Silensu

That's a fine gift to give your guest, Cyclops.

(*He quickly drains cup.*)

Cyclops

What are you doing? Drinking on the sly?

Silenus

The wine kissed me—for my beautiful eyes.

Cyclops

Watch out. You love the wine; it doesn't love you.

Silenus

Yes, by Zeus, it has a passion for my good looks. 555

*Cyclops*Here, pour me a cupful. But just *pour* it.*Silenus*

How is it mixed? Let me taste and see.

(He takes a quick pull.)

Cyclops

Damnation! give it here.

Silenus

By Zeus, not before

I see you crowned—

(He offers Cyclops a wreath of flowers.)
and have another drink.

(He empties the cup.)

Cyclops

This wine-pourer is a cheat! 560

Silenus

Not at all.

The wine's so good it slides down by itself.

Now wipe yourself off before you drink again.

Cyclops

(Wiping his face and beard.)

There. My mouth is clean and so is my beard.

THE CYCLOPS

Silenus

Then crook your arm—gracefully now—and drink,
just as you see me drink—and now you don't.

(*He drains cup.*)

Cyclops

Here! What are you doing?

565

Silenus

Guzzling sweetly.

Cyclops

(*Snatching away the cup and handing it to Odysseus.*)

Here, stranger. Take the flask and pour for me.

Odysseus

At least the wine feels at home in my hand.

Cyclops

Come on, *pour!*

Odysseus

I *am* pouring. Just be still.

Cyclops

That's not so easy when you're in your cups.

Odysseus

There, take it up and drink down every drop,
and don't say die until the wine is gone.

570

Cyclops

Mama. What a wizard the vine must be!

Odysseus

If you drench yourself on a full stomach
and swill your belly full, you'll sleep deep.
If you leave any, Bacchus will shrivel you up.

575

Cyclops

(*Reeling.*)

Whoosh! I can scarcely swim out of this flood.

Pure pleasure! Ohhh. Earth and sky going round,
all mixed up together! Look: I can see
the throne of Zeus and the holy glory
of the gods.

580

(*The satyrs dance around him suggestively.*)

No, I couldn't make love to you!
The Graces tempt me! My Ganymede here

(*He grabs Silenus.*)

is good enough for me. With him I'll sleep
magnificently. By these Graces, I will!
And anyway, I prefer boys to girls.

Silenus

Am I Zeus' little Ganymede, Cyclops?

585

Cyclops

You are, by Zeus! The boy I stole from Dardanos!

Silenus

I'm done for, children. Foul things await me.

Cyclops

Sneer at your lover, do you, because he's drunk?

Silenus

It's a bitter wine I'll have to drink now.

(*Cyclops drags off Silenus protesting into the cave.*)

Odysseus

To work, you noble sons of Dionysus!
Our man's inside the cave. In a short while
his belly will heave its foul meal of flesh.
Look, the brand has begun to smoke inside.
We prepared it for just this: to smoke out
the Cyclops' eye. Now you must act like men.

590

595

Coryphaeus

Our will is made of unbreakable rock.

THE CYCLOPS

But hurry inside before *that* happens to my father. All is ready out here.

Odysseus

(Prays.)

O Hephaestus, ruler over Etna,
free yourself from this vile neighbor of yours!
Sear out his bright eye at one blow! O Sleep,
child of black Night, leap with all your might
on this god-detested beast! And do not,
after our glorious trials at Troy,
betray Odysseus and his crew to death
from a man who cares for neither man nor god.
If you do, we will make a goddess of Chance,
and count her higher than all the other gods!

(He disappears into the cave.)

Chorus

Grim tongs shall clutch by the throat
this beast who bolts down his guests.
Fire shall quench the fire of his eye.
The brand, big as a tree, already waits,
waits in the coals. 615

On, wine, to your work!
Rip out the eye of this raving Cyclops!
Make him regret the day he drank you!
What I want with all my soul to see
is Bacchus, the god who loves the ivy!
Shall I ever see that day? 620

(Odysseus reappears from the cave.)

Odysseus

Quiet, you dogs! By the gods, be quiet!
Hold your tongues. I don't want a man of you
to wink or clear his throat or even breathe.
If we wake up that scourge of evil,
we won't be able to sear out his eye.

E U R I P I D E S

(*The satyrs freeze into silence. The following dialogue is conducted entirely in whispers.*)

Coryphaeus

We are quiet. Our mouths are locked up tight.

Odysseus

To work then. And grab the brand with both hands 630
when you enter the cave. The point is red-hot.

Coryphaeus

You should tell us our stations. Who'll be first
on the blazing pole? And then we can all
take our part in searing out the Cyclops' eye.

First parastate

Where we stand, over here by the entrance, 635
we're too far away to reach his eye.

Second parastate

(*Limping in pain.*)

And just this minute we've gone lame.

First parastate

And we have too. While we were standing here
we sprained our ankles, I don't know how.

Odysseus

Sprained your ankles, standing still? 640

Second parastate

And my eyes
are full of dust and ashes from somewhere.

Odysseus

What cowards! I won't get any help from you.

Coryphaeus

And because I feel for my back and spine

THE CYCLOPS

and don't want to have my teeth knocked out,
I'm a coward, am I? But I can say
a fine Orphic spell that will make the brand
fly of its own accord into the skull
of this one-eyed whelp of Earth and scorch him up.

645

Odysseus

I knew from that first what sort you were,
and now I know it better. If you're too weak
to lend a hand, at least cheer on my men
and put some heart in them by shouting.

650

(He enters the cave.)

Coryphaeus

We'll shout and this "Nobody" will run the risks.
We'll fuddle the Cyclops with our shouting.

655

Chorus

*(Dancing excitedly, shouting at the top of its lungs,
and imitating the action taking place in the cave.)*

Go! Go! As hard as you can!
Push! Thrust! Faster! Burn off
the lashes of the guest-eater!
Smoke him out, burn him out,
the shepherd of Etna!
Twist it! Turn! Careful:
he is hurt and desperate.

660

(A great shriek from within the cave.)

Cyclops

Owwooooo! My eye is scorched to ashes!

665

Coryphaeus

Oh song of songs! Sing it for me, Cyclops!

Cyclops

Owwoo! They've murdered me! I'm finished!
But you won't escape this cave to enjoy

E U R I P I D E S

your triumph, you contemptible nothings.
I'll stand at the entrance and block it—so.

(Polyphemus appears at the threshold of the cave and stretches his arms across it; his face streams with blood.)

Coryphaeus

What's the matter, Cyclops?

Cyclops

I'm dying.

Coryphaeus

You look terrible.

Cyclops

I feel terrible.

670

Coryphaeus

Were you so drunk you fell in the fire?

Cyclops

“Nobody” wounded me.

Coryphaeus

Then you're not hurt.

Cyclops

“Nobody” blinded me.

Coryphaeus

Then you're not blind.

Cyclops

Blind as you.

Coryphaeus

How could nobody make you blind?

Cyclops

You mock me. Where is “Nobody”?

675

T H E C Y C L O P S

Coryphaeus

Nowhere.

Cyclops

It's the stranger I mean, you fool, the one
who stuffed me full of wine and did me in.

Coryphaeus

(*Sententiously.*)

Wine is tricky; very hard to wrestle with.

Cyclops

By the gods, has he escaped or is he inside?

Coryphaeus

There they are, standing quiet over there,
under cover of the rock.

680

Cyclops

On which side?

Coryphaeus

On your right.

(*Cyclops leaves the entrance and stumbles with out-stretched hands toward the right. Meanwhile the Greeks steal out of the cave.*)

Cyclops

Where?

Coryphaeus

Over against the rock.

Do you have them?

Cyclops

(*Running into a jutting rock.*)

Ouf! Trouble on trouble.

I've split my head.

Coryphaeus

And now they've escaped you.

Cyclops

This way, did you say?

Coryphaeus

No, the other way.

Cyclops

Which way?

Coryphaeus

Turn around. There. On your left.

685

Cyclops

You're laughing at me in my misery.

Coryphaeus

Not now. There he is in front of you.

Cyclops

Where are you, demon?

*(The Greeks stand at the entrance on the right, a whole length of the stage away from Cyclops.)**Odysseus*

Out of your reach,

Looking after the safety of Odysseus.

690

Cyclops

What? A new name? Have you changed your name?

Odysseus

Odysseus: the name my father gave me.

You have had to pay for your unholy meal.

I would have done wrong to have fired Troy

but not revenge the murder of my men.

695

Cyclops

Ah! The old oracle has been fulfilled.

It said that after you had come from Troy,
you would blind me. But you would pay for this,
it said, and wander the seas for many years.

700

T H E C Y C L O P S

Odysseus

Much I care! What's done is done. As for me,
I'm off to the shore where I'll launch my ship
on the Sicilian shore and sail for home.

(*Exit.*)

Cyclops

Not yet. I'll rip a boulder from this cliff
and crush you and all your crew beneath it.
Blind I may be, but I'll reach the mountain-top
soon enough through the tunnel in the cave.

705

(*Exits into cave.*)

Chorus

We'll enlist in the crew of Odysseus.
From now our orders come from Bacchus.

HERACLES

Translated and with an Introduction by

WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

INTRODUCTION TO HERACLES

The *Heracles* of Euripides is seldom assigned a high place in the corpus of extant tragedy. If no one any longer quite accepts Swinburne's description of the play as a "grotesque abortion," the reason is less real disagreement than a habit of respect for the author, supported by a cautious intuition of the play's extraordinary power. Of caution there should be no question. However dislocated in structure the *Heracles* may be, its dramatic power and technical virtuosity are unmistakable. With the possible exception of the *Bacchae*, there is no play into which Euripides has put more of himself and his mature poetic skills than this one. In scene after scene one senses that sureness of movement and precise control of passion which come only with the dramatist's full mastery of his medium. One thinks first of the staggering brutality and shock which erupts in the madness scene, a brutality made all the more terrible by the tenderness which precedes it; or of the great dirge which celebrates the labors of Heracles, and then the confrontation of that ode with the hero's simple "Farewell, my labors"; or, again, of the exquisite ode in praise of youth and the service of the Muses, poetry tense with the full pressure of the poet's life behind it; and, last of all, that anguished exchange between Theseus and Heracles in which the hero, broken by his suffering, weak, reduced to his final humanity, comes on his greatest heroism, surely one of the most poignant codas in Greek tragedy.

Technically, at least, it is a brilliant performance, boldness of dramatic stroke and vigor of invention everywhere visible, but particularly in the brisk counterpoint of peripeties on

which the tragedy turns, wheeling over and over as one action pivots to its opposite, or, juxtaposed against a sudden illumination, is as suddenly shattered and annulled. Through theme after theme, with perfect tact of tempo and placing, the reversals crowd, taking each motif a further turn of the wheel. Thus the first action of the play, slow, conventional, overwhelmed by the weakness of its characters, creates out of desperation a sudden and time-honored theodicy. The wheel turns, and a violent irruption of the irrational smashes all theodicy; then, in the last swing, both irrational and theodicy are alike undone in the hero's enormous leap to an illusion of order in divinity, an assertion which he maintains squarely in the teeth of his experience. The savior who suddenly turns destroyer is in turn saved from self-destruction by the man he had earlier saved from Hades. The hero is reduced to his humanity as the condition of his heroism. Throughout the tragedy, gathering momentum by contrast, runs the rhythm of its minor terms: first despair, then hope, then again despair, and finally an endurance deeper than either; age and youth, weakness and strength, both pairs resolved in the condition that makes them one. Schematic, brilliant, savagely broken, the *Heracles* is a play of great power and, with the exception of the *Orestes*, the most violent structural tour-de-force in Greek tragedy.

It is this very dislocation, this virtuosity and violence in the play's structure, which more than anything else has injured its reputation and hindered reappraisal. Given Aristotelian standards of judgment (and Aristotle even today affects dramatic criticism at a profound level), the play's dislocation could not but appear either pointless or gratuitous; for at almost every conceivable point the play is in flat contradiction to the principles of the *Poetics*. Thus *Heracles* has no visible *hamartia*; if he falls, he falls for no flaw of his own nature or failure of judgment, but as the innocent victim of divine brutality. And still worse, the play exhibits not at all that deep, necessitous *propter hoc* connection between its parts, which for Aristotle constituted the right structure of tragedy.¹ With almost one

1. *Poetics* 1452^a. 20.

voice both critics and scholars from Aristotle to the present have reported the dislocation of the play as an insuperable blemish. The *Heracles*, they say, is "broken-backed,"² a tragedy that "falls so clearly into two parts that we cannot view it as a work of art."³ But in so saying, they report, I think, as much their own outraged Aristotelianism as the obvious facts of the play's structure.

Beyond question the play falls starkly into two discrete but continuous actions, and between these two actions there is neither causal necessity nor even probability: the second action follows but by no means arises out of the first. Through the close of the chorus which celebrates the slaying of Lycus (l. 814), we have one complete action as conventional in movement as it is in subject: a familiar tableau of suppliants, their cruel antagonist, an *agōn* in which the tormentor is slain by the savior, and a closing hymn in praise of the hero and the vindicated justice of the gods. This melodramatic action is shattered by the appearance of Madness and Iris, and the play, in violation of all probability, careens around to commence a wholly new action. Utterly unexpected and without causal ground in the first part of the play, the madness of Heracles and the murder of his wife and children are simply set down in glaring contrast to the preceding action. Against theodicy is put the hideous proof of divine injustice; against the greatness and piety and *areté* of Heracles in the first action is placed the terrible reward of heroism in the second; against the asserted peace and calm and domestic tenderness which closes the first action is set the utter annihilation of all moral order in the second. The result is a structure in which two apparently autonomous actions are jammed savagely against each other in almost total contradiction, with no attempt to minimize or even modulate the profound formal rift.

That rift is, of course, deliberate; nothing, in fact, has been omitted which might support the effect of total shock in this reversal. Moreover, even a cursory review of the material which Euripides used for his tragedy shows how carefully that ma-

2. Gilbert Murray, *Greek Studies*, p. 112.

3. Gilbert Norwood, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 229.

terial has been ordered to effect, rather than obviate, this dislocation of structure.

Old tradition told of Hera's persecution of Heracles because of her jealousy of Zeus' amour with Heracles' mother, Alcmene. It also told how Heracles, driven mad by Hera, slew his sons and would also have killed his father, Amphitryon, had not Athene intervened and knocked the raging hero unconscious with a stone. For the most part Euripides has retained these traditions, but with this great difference: whereas in the common tradition the great labors of Heracles were undertaken in penance for the murder of the children, Euripides has transposed the murders to the time just after the completion of the labors, the height of Heracles' career. Because Heracles at the very moment of his fall is at his greatest, the hideousness of Hera's revenge is sharply underscored and its abrupt, tragic senselessness stressed. The dramatist, that is, has ordered his material in such a way as to achieve precisely that dislocation which the play's structure exhibits. Nor is this all. Because Euripides has transposed the labors and the murders, he has been forced to invent a new motive for the labors. This is the motive of filial piety: Heracles undertook his labors in order to win back the country from which Amphitryon had been exiled for the murder of Electryon. Thus at the same time that Euripides freely invents in order to fill the gap caused by the original transposition, he also subtly humanizes his hero in preparation for the conversion which is the heart of the second action.

Tradition also told of Heracles' suicide on Mt. Oeta (cf. Sophocles' *Trachiniae*) and how after death the hero was translated to heaven and given everlasting youth in the person of Hebe. This entire saga is suppressed in the Euripidean version, but the very fact of its suppression informs the *Heracles* throughout, pointing up the direction of the action against what has been excluded. Thus Heracles, far from being deified in Euripides, is humanized⁴ as the condition of his heroism.

4. In the humanization of Heracles, Euripides returns to the oldest of all extant Heracles traditions, the Homeric, in which Heracles too had to die. Cf. *Iliad* xviii. 115 ff.: "Not even the great Heracles

And far from committing suicide, the Euripidean Heracles discovers his greatest nobility in refusing to die and choosing life. If, again in the older tradition, Heracles married Hebe (i.e., youth) and so won everlasting life, in the Euripidean play Hebe is present to the action as nothing more than an impossible anguished reminder of mortal necessity and the haunting image of what in a universe not fatally flawed might have been the reward of human virtue (cf. 637-72). Similarly, the suppression of the deification motif sharpens the courageous endurance of mankind under its necessities in contrast with the happiness of the amoral gods. Deification is replaced by the closest thing to Olympus this world can offer—honored asylum at Athens. For this reason Theseus is introduced as the representative of Athenian humanity to rescue and annex to Athens the greatest Dorian hero.

By deployment of his material Euripides has structured his play into two parallel actions divided by a peripety whose purpose is more to stress the break than to bridge it. If the *Heracles* is broken, the dislocation is at least deliberate, and as such it is clearly consistent with Euripides' practice elsewhere: in the two actions of the *Hecuba*, the double plot of the *Hippolytus*, the episodic *Trojan Women* or *Phoenissae*, the broken *Andromache*, and the dislocated *Electra*. But even more violently than these plays the *Heracles* insists on the irreparable rift in its structure and invites us by its great power to discover what nonetheless makes it one play. It is right that our perception of power in literature should lead us more deeply into the order and disorder created or invoked.

Despite the fact that the first action is entirely free invention, it is important to see how conventional the treatment is. In the shaping of the characters, in their attributes and motives, in the theology and received values to which the action appeals, convention is everywhere visible. Character is essen-

escaped death, though he was dear to the lord Zeus, the son of Cronus, but the common fate brought him down, and the grievous wrath of Hera." In literature of the historical period this tradition has almost everywhere been eclipsed by the deified Heracles, a version which begins also with Homer (cf. *Odyssey* xi. 601 ff.).

tially static, the action as a whole leached of any really tragic movement. All the emotional stops of a melodramatic situation have been pulled: we move from the despair of the helpless family to the sudden coming of the savior hero to the triumphant final diapason of vindicated divine justice. The characters are only lightly dubbed in, certainly no more so than is necessary to maintain the illusion that these are real people in a situation of unqualified peril. If the action is not quite trite, it is at least customary and predictable, so predictable in fact that it might be regarded as a parody of a standard tragic movement. Certainly no one familiar with Euripides' practice can doubt that the comfortable theodicy which closes the action has been written tongue-in-cheek or is somehow surely riding for a fall. And insensibly the impression of purely tragic power in the second action, although based on an analogous plot, undercuts the first action and exposes its conventionality.

What is true of the first action as a whole is also true of the Heracles of the first action. The traditional *données* which compose his figure have for the most part been carefully preserved; if Heracles is not here the beefeater of comedy or the ruddy sensualist of the *Alcestis*, he is recognizably the familiar culture-hero of Dorian and Boeotian tradition: strong, courageous, noble, self-sufficient, carrying on his back all the aristocratic *aretē* of the moralized tradition of Pindar. Thus the grossnesses or cruelties or philandering which tradition sometimes ascribed to him (cf. again the *Trachiniae*) have been stripped away. In domestic life he is a devoted son, a loyal husband, and a fond father; in civil life he is the just king, the enemy of *hybris*, the champion of the helpless, and the loyal servant of the gods. His civilizing labors on behalf of mankind are accepted as literal truths, and the curious ambiguity in tradition which made Heracles the son of two fathers, Zeus and Amphitryon, is maintained. His heroism is based upon his strength and is essentially outward, but nonetheless valid, or at least valid enough for the muted reality of the first action.

Against this background, the second action breaks with tragic force and striking transformations, showing first the

HERACLES

conquering hero, the *kallinikos*, reduced to tears, helpless, dependent, and in love, stripped of that outward strength which until now had exempted him from normal human necessity, and discovering both his common ground with men and a new internalized moral courage. This Heracles is not merely untraditional; he is almost inconceivable in traditional perspective, and he is tragic where the earlier Heracles was merely noble. The point to be insisted upon here is the distance at every point between the two actions. We have here moved a whole world away from the simple virtues and theodicy of the first action, as the new role and courage of the hero undercut everything the play has created up to now. The world of the given, the reality of "things as they are said to be," withers and is replaced, not by a mere contradiction, but by a new tragic myth invoking new values and grounded in a sterner reality. What audience, especially a Greek one, could have recognized in that broken, almost domestic, Heracles fighting back his tears, the familiar and austere culture-hero of received tradition?

We have, then, two savagely different actions, one conventional and the other set in a world where tradition is dumb and conduct uncharted, placed harshly in contrast. The peripety which separates them is the dramatist's means of expressing symbolically the fatal disorder of the moral universe, and also the device by which the heroism of the second action is forced up, through an utter transformation of assumed reality. The whole play exhibits, as though on two plateaus, a *conversion* of reality. A story or legend derived from received beliefs—the world of myth and the corpus of "things as they are said to be"—is suddenly in all of its parts, terms, characters, and the values it invokes *converted* under dramatic pressure to another phase of reality. What we get is something like a dramatic mutation of received reality, and the leap the play makes between the phases or plateaus of its two realities is meant to correspond in force and vividness and apparent unpredictability to mutations in the physical world. It is this violence in the conversion of reality that explains the wrenching dislocation of Euripidean drama from an Aris-

totelian point of view and the lack of apparent connection between the parts of the play. The play pivots on two seemingly incompatible realities, and if it insists on the greater reality of what has been created over what has been received, it does so, not by denying reality to received reality, but by subtly displacing it in the transfiguration of its terms.

Thus, point for point in the *Heracles*, each of the terms—the qualities, situation, characters—that was appropriate to the Heracles of tradition is transformed and displaced. If in the first action both Zeus and Amphitryon are the fathers of Heracles, in the second action Amphitryon becomes Heracles' "real" father, not by the fact of conception, but by the greater fact of love, *philia*. In the first action Heracles literally descended to a literal Hades; in the second action this literal descent is transfigured in the refusal to die and the courage which, under an intolerable necessity, perseveres. There is a hint, moreover, that the old Hades of the poets with its Cerberus, Sisyphus, and torments is transformed in the second part into the Hades within, here and now, internalized as Heracles himself declares, "And I am like Ixion, forever chained to a flying wheel." So too the old labors appear to be replaced by the metaphorical sense of the imposed labors of human life and the cost of civilization, while the goddess Hera, who in legend made Heracles mad, passes almost insensibly into a hovering symbol of all those irrational and random necessities which the Greek and the play call *Tyche*, and which we limply translate as "Fortune" or "necessity."

All of these conversions replace and dislodge the reality of the first action by transfiguring it at every point. The first action in the light of the second is neither false nor unreal, but inadequate. Through the force of contrast with its own conversion, it comes to seem obsolete, naïve, or even humdrum, much as fresh conviction formed under *peine forte et dure* insensibly makes the conviction it replaces callow or jejune in comparison. Under the changed light of experience and the pattern it imposes, what was once taken for reality comes to seem illusion at best: true while held as true, but with widened experience, discovered inadequate. What we see is less

the contradiction between the two opposed realities than the counterpointed relation of their development, the way in which, under the blow of suffering and insight, one reality is made to yield a further one, each geared to its appropriate experience. We begin with a familiar and conventional world, operating from familiar motives among accepted though outmoded values; by the time the play closes, characters, motives, and values have all been pushed to the very frontiers of reality.

But if in this context of conversion the conventional first action is undercut and dislodged by the tragic second action, the first action also helps to inform the second and to anticipate its discoveries. Thus Heracles' desperation after his madness is paralleled by his family's desperation in the first part; what they say and do there is meant to be applied with full force to his situation later. If courage for them lies in the nobility with which they accept the necessity of death, nobility for Heracles lies in the courage with which he accepts his life as his necessity, for, in Amphitryon's words:

To persevere, trusting in what hopes he has,
is courage in a man. The coward despairs [ll. 105-6].

If Amphitryon in the first action possesses a "useless" life (l. 42) by virtue of extreme old age and weakness, Heracles later comes to possess the same "useless" life (l. 1302), and so both meet on the grounds of their common condition. Similarly the chorus speaks of its own necessity, old age, as "a weight more heavy than Aetna's rocks, / hiding in darkness / the light of my eyes" (ll. 639-41); that same darkness, not as age but as grief, lies later on the eyes of Heracles (ll. 1140, 1159, 1198, 1104-5, 1216, 1226 ff.), the dark night of his soul. And just as the chorus in the first action finds the hope of its life in poetry and perseveres in the Muses' service, so Theseus uncovers Heracles to the sun and shows him the hope in *philia* which enables him to live. So too when Heracles, self-sufficient and independent, leads his children into the palace before his madness, he draws them behind him like little boats in tow (*epholkidas*); but at the end of the play Heracles, broken,

in love and dependent, follows in Theseus' wake to Athens like a little boat in tow (*epholkides*). The same implicit counter-point between the two actions explains in part, I think, the unqualified villainy of Lycus. Balancing the corruption of human power and brutality (*amathia*) in him, comes the abuse of divine power in Hera—a far more heinous abuse, since divine cruelty is a *fortiori* worse than human brutality. Beyond this, I suspect, we are intended to see correspondence again in the physical death which Lycus meets at Heracles' hands and the spiritual annihilation of Hera which is the consequence of Heracles' great speech on the gods (ll. 1340–46). But throughout the play, in metaphor, in contrast of whole scenes, in visual imagery, the two actions are paralleled at point after point. Below the level of the violent structural dislocation of the play runs a constant crisscross of reference, comment, and contrast throwing single words or themes into sharp relief in continuous qualification of the whole action. In the perception of this continuous conversion of the play's terms lies the understanding of its movement and unity.

Point by point the deepest motive of the play is to bring Heracles to the place where he shares for the first time common ground with the others, all of whom, like him, are laid under the heavy yoke of necessity but lack that enormous physical strength which has hitherto exempted him. But if he must come to share that yoke with them, if he is reduced to his humanity as the condition of the only heroism that counts, he also comes to know for the first time that other, and redeeming, yoke of love, *philia*, which alone makes necessity endurable. For the *Heracles* is a play which imposes suffering upon men as their tragic condition, but it also discovers a courage equal to that necessity, a courage founded on love. We witness in the play a conversion of heroism whose model is Heracles, and the heart of that conversion lies in the hero's passage in suffering from the outworn courage of outward physical strength to a new internal courage, without exemption now but with the addition of love and perseverance against an intolerable necessity..

Love is the hope, the *elpis*, which permits him to endure,

and his discovery of that hope keeps step with his knowledge of anguish. He survives by virtue of love, for love lies close to, if it does not usurp, the instinct for survival. At the close of the play we see Heracles assert the dignity of his grief against the reproaches of a Theseus who, for all his generosity, is still rooted in the old heroism and no longer understands. Having claimed the dignity of his new courage, Heracles can without weakness or loss of tragic stature make plain the wreck of his life and his own dependent helplessness: strong but also weak, in need and in love, a hero at every point.

Heracles comes through suffering, then, to occupy the ground where Megara, Amphitryon, and the chorus stood earlier. Their nobility provides a standard by which to measure his heroism, first challenging it and then being surpassed by it. But nothing in Heracles is diminished because Megara and Amphitryon have set the example he must follow, and know already what he must learn. Their very weakness has set them close to necessity, while Heracles' *aretē* has been so prodigiously developed toward physical strength that nothing short of the greatest moral courage is required for him to survive his necessity. He rises and keeps on rising to his sufferings with an enormous range of spirit that in the end leaves even the unconventional Theseus far behind him. It is this ability to rise that makes him great as much as the overwhelming anguish of the necessity that confronts him. What counts in the end is not the disparity between Heracles' courage and necessity and the courage of the others, but the fact that they all—Megara, Amphitryon, the chorus, and Heracles—meet on the common ground of their condition and discover both courage and hope in the community of weakness and love.

What, finally, are we to make of Hera and that crucial speech of Heracles on the nature of the gods (ll. 1340–46)? That it was Hera who made Heracles mad was, as we have seen, an essential part of Euripides' legendary material. But the consequence of Heracles' speech is apparently to deny that the actions of the gods could in fact be such as they are dramatized to be. Alternatively Heracles appears to deny the reality of the experience out of which he makes the speech in the first

place. For to say that "if god is truly god, then he is perfect, / lacking nothing" is clearly to invalidate Hera's claim to divinity, or to deny his own experience of Hera's hatred.

The sentiment is, to be sure, Euripidean, a familiar refusal to believe the old legends which represent the gods as subject to human passions, and a discountenance of the familiar fifth-century notion that immoral conduct could be sanctioned by an appeal to divine conduct as recounted in poetry. But merely because the lines are Euripidean in thought, their effect for the play should not be glazed away as mere inconsistencies or as an undramatic intrusion of the dramatist *in propria persona*. For to say that divine adultery, tyranny, and misconduct are all "the wretched tales of poets" is a direct and unmistakable challenge not only to the Hera of the play, but to the whole Olympian system.

The consequences of Heracles' words for the play are, I suggest, this: that the story of Hera's action as dramatized is true enough, but the Hera who afflicts Heracles as she does thereby renounces any claim to the kind of divinity which Heracles asserts. This conclusion is, I think, supported by Euripides' practice elsewhere and also by the language of the play. Like the *Hippolytus* with Aphrodite and the *Bacchae* with Dionysus, the *Heracles* does two things with Hera: it first dramatizes the legend which contains her action as incredible in a goddess,⁵ and then, having shown and asserted its incredibility, it converts her into a hovering symbol of all the unknown and unknowable forces which compel Heracles and men to suffer tragically and without cause or sense. As Dionysus is a complex symbol for the forces of life, amoral and necessitous, so Hera comprehends all the principles of peripety and change and random necessity. She is not Hera, but "Hera," a name given her for the want of a name, but loosely what the Greeks meant by *Tyche*, the lady of necessity and reversal. In asserting this "Hera" as the consequence of his own speech, Heracles annihilates the old Olympian Hera as a

5. Cf. ll. 1307-10 where Heracles asks: "Who could offer prayers to such a goddess? Jealous of Zeus for a mortal woman's sake, she had destroyed Hellas' greatest friend, though he was guiltless."

goddess, but also converts her into that demonic and terribly real power of his own necessity. The tragedy of Heracles is both true and real, but it is no longer the traditional story, nor is Heracles the same man, nor Hera the same goddess. And it is to confirm this conversion that Heracles a few lines later (l. 1357) concludes: "And now, I see, I must serve necessity (*tyche*)."⁶ So too in his last reference to Hera he hints at the conversion by significantly juxtaposing both *tyche* and the name of Hera, claiming that "we all have been struck down by one *tyche* of Hera" (l. 1393).⁶ And, if this were not enough, the play's overwhelming preoccupation with peripety as theme and as dislocation in structure would confirm the conversion. This, I think, is what we should expect, that the conversion of the old legend of Heracles and his old nobility into a new myth should be accompanied by the conversion of his necessity as well. To alter his old heroism without also altering the source of his suffering would be to cripple the conversion at the crucial point. It would obscure, that is, the fact that Heracles, though broken by necessity, still wins the moral victory over the power that ruins him, earning for himself and men in a different sense the victory claimed by Amphitryon over Zeus earlier:

And I, mere man, am nobler than you, a great god [l. 342].

He claims a courage more than equal to his condition and can therefore claim the dignity of his grief.

Heracles is no Aristotelian hero, nor is the play an Aristotelian tragedy; yet the *Heracles* is a great tragedy and Heracles himself a great tragic hero. The gulf between Euripides and Aristotle on the issues here is a great and permanent one that deserves to be stressed. For Aristotle a tragic fall is grounded in a consistent and harmonious sense of man's responsibility for his nature and his actions: when the hero falls, he falls for his own failure, and behind the rightness of his fall, working both pity and fear by the precise and relent-

6. Cf. ll. 1314, 1349, 1396, as well as the significant disjunction, "mastered by Hera or by necessity" in Amphitryon's speech at l. 20.

less nature of its operations, stands the order which society and a god-informed world impose upon the individual. What the law requires the gods require too, and so the Aristotelian play portrays, like an image of human life, the individual torn and suffering between his nature and an objective world-order. In Euripides it is otherwise; here the suffering of the individual under his necessity may have no such rightness, or even none at all, as in the *Heracles*. The world-order of the gods as reflected in "things as they are said to be" is either incredible or an indictment of that order, and if it imposes necessities unjustly upon a man, the very courage with which he endures makes him tragic and gives him the moral victory over his own fate. Similarly with society: for society may be no less corrupt than the "gods" and as unjust in the necessities it imposes. Euripides, that is, preserves the disorder of actual experience, measuring its horror against the unrequited illusion of order which sustains human beings. His image of tragic humanity is earned less in the conflict between the individual's nature and the necessities imposed by a higher order than in the conflict between the individual and his own internalized necessities. In the *Heracles*, at least, it is the very innocence of the hero which condemns the "gods" who make him mad; but because the gods are first rendered incredible and then transformed into a collective symbol for all the random, senseless operations of necessity in human life, the courage with which the hero meets his fate and asserts a moral order beyond his own experience is just as tragic and just as significant as that of Oedipus.

Date and Circumstances

The *Heracles* is undated, and no attempt to date the play to any one year can be regarded as wholly successful. The most favored date is one close to 424-423. It has been held that the heavy emphasis throughout the play upon old age in connection with military service, particularly the bitter first strophe of the second *stasimōn* (ll. 637 ff.), represents a direct

personal intrusion of the poet on having reached his sixtieth year (when he would have been exempt from further military service). On such a theory the date of the play would be 424-423. Similarly, the disproportionate debate on the bow (ll. 188 ff.) is interpreted as an overt reference to the Athenian success at Sphakteria in 425—a victory due largely to bowmen—or to the disastrous failure to employ archers in the hoplite defeat at Delium in 424. The reference to Delian maidens (ll. 687 ff.) is taken as a remembrance of the establishment of the quinquennial *Deliades* in Athens in 425.

But no one of these suggestions, nor even their ensemble, can be regarded as decisive. The strongest argument for a later date is one given by stylistic and metrical tests, generally rather accurate for Euripides. These tend to place the play in the group of dramas which directly follow the Archidamian War, or about 418-416.

It is my opinion that the metrical tests are supported in their results by the general political tone of the play, with its sharp emphasis upon factional strife and its concern with the badge of true nobility. Further, the reconciliation between Sparta and Athens which is suggested in Theseus' domiciling of Heracles in Athens would seem to suggest (though it need not) a period in which reconciliation between Athens and Sparta was possible. Such reconciliation was a possibility only, I believe, in the period between the close of the Archidamian War in 421 and the aggressive anti-Spartan policy of Alcibiades which culminated in the Athenian-Argive defeat at Mantinea in 418. It is only against such a background as this, when all major parties in the Peloponnesian War were attempting abortive realignments, when peace must have appeared to be at least a remote possibility to contemporaries, that the lines of Megara (ll. 474-79) can be made to yield good sense. If so, the death of the children who embody the peaceful hopes of a united Hellas (ll. 135-37) must mean the renewal of conflict. A renewal of conflict must have seemed the certain consequence of Alcibiades' policies in 418, whereas in the years just previous an alliance between Athens and Sparta must have excited real hopes of an enduring peace.

Text

The basis of this translation is the Oxford text of Gilbert Murray, though it has often been supplemented by others,¹ chiefly the brilliant edition of Leon Parmentier in the Budé series.² Upon a few occasions I have also adopted the emendations proposed by Wilamowitz. The notes on the translation are not designed to indicate all departures from the Murray text (nor even to mark the numerous occasions on which I preferred the reading of the manuscripts over modern emendations),³ but to amplify variations or emendations whose use

1. L. 496: cf. D. S. Robertson, "Euripides, H.F. 497 ff.," C.R. LII (1938), 50-51.

2. L. 1241: "Then where it touches heaven, I shall strike." I adopt here the emendation of Parmentier and read *kai thenein* for *katthanein*. Since Theseus at l. 1246 asks Heracles what he will do and where his passion sweeps him, and Heracles replies in the following line that he will die, it seems plausible that *katthanein* here is a simple copyist's mistake for the less familiar *kai thenein*. And, as Parmentier remarks, the line as emended pivots on a play with the word *haptēi* in the preceding line (l. 1240). It is also more likely that Theseus in l. 1242 would take *thenein* as a threat against the gods than he would the precise self-directed *katthanein*. See L. Parmentier, *Revue de philologie*, XLIV (1920), 161.

3. L. 1351: *Enkarterēsō thanaton* ("I shall prevail against death"). *Thanaton* is here the reading of the manuscripts and, to some degree, it is supported by the identical phrase at *Andromache* l. 262 (though in each case the contextual meaning is different). Murray, following Wecklein and Wilamowitz, however, has altered *thanaton* to *bioton* (life).

So far as the quality of affirmation is concerned here, however, there is little difference between *thanaton* and *bioton*. Both imply the affirmative decision to bear necessity by living; clarity is unaffected by either reading. Though to prevail against life (in the sense of "persevering") may be more forceful than to prevail against death (in the sense of resisting the temptation to die), it seems to me that the imagery of the play is decisive for *thanaton*. In Heracles' words here, that is, we have the metaphorical (but also realistic) equivalent of the mythical descent to Hades and the conquest of death it signifies. Heracles has in his sufferings been to Hades and at death's door; he now wrestles with his death as myth once imagined him as wrestling for Cerberus. And just as the chorus once (ll. 655 ff.) hoped that

H E R A C L E S

appeared to me to bear upon the interpretation of the whole play. Lines which are bracketed indicate probable interpolations.

the noble man might receive a double life as a reward of *aretē*, in this line we see the vindication of *aretē* in the internalized *eugeneia* which conquers death.

C H A R A C T E R S

Amphitryon, father of Heracles

Megara, wife of Heracles

Chorus of old men of Thebes

Lycus, usurper of the throne of Thebes

Heracles

Iris, messenger of the gods

Madness

Messenger

Theseus, king of Athens

For Robert and Renée Preyer

zeugos ge philion

HERACLES

HYPOTHESIS: *Heracles after his marriage with Megara, daughter of Creon, had children by her. . . . Leaving his sons in Thebes, he himself went to Argos to accomplish his labors for Eurystheus. After he had prevailed in all of them, he descended to Hades and passed a long time there and then returned, to the surprise of the living, who had thought him dead. While the Thebans were embroiled in civil strife against Creon the king, a usurper from Euboea by the name of Lycus. . . .*

SCENE: *Before the palace of Heracles at Thebes. In the foreground is the altar of Zeus. On its steps, in the posture of suppliants, sit the aged Amphitryon, Megara, and her three small sons. Amphitryon rises and speaks the prologue.*

Amphitryon

What mortal lives who has not heard this name—

Amphitryon of Argos, who shared his wife

with Zeus? I am he: son of Alcaeus

Perseus' son, but father of Heracles.

Here I settled, in this Thebes, where once the earth

was sown with dragontooths and sprouted men;

and Ares saved a few that they might people

Cadmus' city with their children's children.

From these sown men Creon was descended,

son of Menoeceus and our late king.

This lady is Megara, Creon's daughter,

for whose wedding once all Thebes shrilled
to flutes and songs as she was led, a bride,
home to his father's halls by Heracles.

10

Then my son left home, left Megara and kin,
hoping to recover the plain of Argos
and those gigantic walls from which I fled
to Thebes, because I killed Electryon.

15

He hoped to win me back my native land
and so alleviate my grief. And therefore,
mastered by Hera or by necessity,
he promised to Eurystheus a vast price
for our return: to civilize the world.

20

When all his other labors had been done,
he undertook the last: descended down
to Hades through the jaws of Taenarus
to hale back up to the light of day
the triple-bodied dog.

He has not come back.

25

Here in Thebes the legend goes that once
a certain Lycus married Dirce, our queen,
and ruled this city with its seven gates
before the twins of Zeus, those "white colts,"
Amphion and Zethus, ruled the land.

30

This Lycus' namesake and descendant,
no native Theban but Euboean-born,
attacked our city, sick with civil war,
murdered Creon and usurped his throne.

And now our marriage-bond with Creon's house
has proved in fact to be our greatest ill.

35

For since my son is gone beneath the earth,
this upstart tyrant, Lycus, plans to kill
the wife and sons of Heracles—and me,
so old and useless, that I scarcely count—
blotting murder with more, lest these boys
grown to men, someday revenge their mother's house.

40

My son, when he descended to the darkness
underground, left me here, appointing me
both nurse and guardian of his little sons.

45

H E R A C L E S

Now, to keep these heirs of Heracles from death,
 their mother and I in supplication
 kneeled to Zeus the Savior at this altar,
 established by the prowess of my son,
 the trophy of his conquering spear
 and monument of Minyan victory.

50

Here we sit, in utter destitution,
 lacking food, water, and clothing; having no beds
 but the bare earth beneath our bodies;
 barred from our house, empty of hope.

And of our friends, some prove no friends at all,
 while those still true are powerless to help.

55

This is what misfortune means among mankind;
 upon no man who wished me well at all,
 could I wish this acid test of friends might fall.

Megara

Old man, marshal of our famous Theban arms,
 who once destroyed the city of the Taphians,
 how dark are all the ways of god to man!

60

Prosperity was my inheritance:
 I had a father who could boast of wealth,
 who had such power as makes the long spears
 leap with greed against its proud possessor—
 a father, blessed with children, who gave me
 in glorious marriage to your Heracles.

65

But now his glory is gone down in death,
 and you and I, old man, shall soon be dead,
 and with us, these small sons of Heracles
 whom I ward and nestle underwing.

70

First one, then another, bursts in tears,
 and asks: "Mother, where has Father gone?
 What is he doing? When will he come back?"
 Then, too small to understand, they ask again
 for "Father." I put them off with stories;
 but when the hinges creak, they all leap up
 to run and throw themselves at their father's feet.
 Is there any hope? What chance of rescue

75

do we have, old man? We look to you.
 The border is impassable by stealth;
 sentries have been set on every road;
 all hope that friends might rescue us is gone.
 So tell me now if you have any plan,
 or if you have resigned yourself to death.

80

85

Amphitryon

My child, I find it hard in such a case
 to give advice offhand without hard thought.
 We are weak, and weakness can only wait.

Megara

Wait for worse? Do you love life so much?

90

Amphitryon

I love it even now. I love its hopes.

Megara

And I. But hope is of things possible.

Amphitryon

A cure may come in wearing out the time.

Megara

It is the time between that tortures me.

Amphitryon

Even now, out of our very evils,
 for you and me a better wind may blow.
 My son, your husband, still may come. Be calm;
 dry the living springs of tears that fill
 your children's eyes. Console them with stories,
 those sweet thieves of wretched make-believe.
 Human misery must somewhere have a stop:
 there is no wind that always blows a storm;
 great good fortune comes to failure in the end.

95

100

H E R A C L E S

All is change; all yields its place and goes;
to persevere, trusting in what hopes he has,
is courage in a man. The coward despairs.

105

(Enter the Chorus of old men of Thebes. They
walk painfully, leaning upon their staffs.)

Chorus

STROPHE

Leaning on our staffs we come
to the vaulted halls and the old man's bed,
our song the dirge of the dying swan,
ourselves mere words, ghosts that walk
in the visions of night,
trembling with age,
trembling to help.
O children, fatherless sons,
old man and wretched wife
who mourn your lord in Hades!

110

115

ANTISTROPHE

Do not falter. Drag your weary feet
onward like the colt that, yoked and slow,
tugs uphill, on rock, the heavy wain.

120

If any man should fall,
support him with your hands,
age hold up his years
as once when he was young
he supported his peers
in the toils of war
and was no blot on his country's fame.

125

EPODE

Look how the children's eyes
flash forth like their father's!
Misfortune has not left them,
nor has loveliness.

130

O Hellas, Hellas,

losing these boys,
what allies you lose!

135

No more. Look: I see my country's tyrant,
Lycus, approaching the palace.

(Enter Lycus with attendants.)

Lycus

You there,

father of Heracles, and you, his wife:
allow me one question. And you must allow it:
I am the power here; I ask what I wish.
How long will you seek to prolong your lives?

140

What hope have you? What could prevent your death?
Or do you think the father of these boys
who lies dead with Hades will still come back?
How shabbily you suffer when you both must die—
you who filled all Hellas with your hollow boasts
that Zeus was partner in your son's conception;
and you, that you were wife of the noblest man!
What was so prodigious in your husband's deeds?
Because he killed a hydra in a marsh?

145

Or the Nemean lion? They were trapped in nets,
not strangled, as he claims, with his bare hands.

Are these your arguments? Because of this,
you say, the sons of Heracles should live—
a man who, coward in everything else,
made his reputation fighting beasts,

150

who never buckled shield upon his arm,
never came near a spear, but held a bow,
the coward's weapon, handy to run away?

160

The bow is no proof of manly courage;
no, your real man stands firm in the ranks
and dares to face the gash the spear may make.

My policy, old man, is not mere cruelty;
call it caution. I am well aware
that I killed Creon and usurped his throne.
It does not suit my wishes that these boys
go free to take their grown revenge on me.

165

HERACLES

Amphitryon

Let Zeus act to guard his interest in his son. 170
 For my part, Heracles, I have but words
 to prove this man's gross ignorance of you.
 I cannot bear that you should be abused.
 First for his slander, for such I call it
 when you are called a coward, Heracles. 175
 I call upon the gods to bear me witness:
 that thunder of Zeus, his chariot
 in which you rode, stabbing with winged shafts
 the breasts of the giant spawn of earth,
 and raised the victory-cry with the gods! 180
 Go to Pholoë and see the centaurs,
 go ask them, those four-legged monsters,
 what man they judge to be the bravest,
 if not my son, whose courage you call sham.
 Go ask Abantian Dirphys which bore you: 185
 it will not praise you. You have never done
 one brave deed your fatherland could cite.
 You sneer at that wise invention, the bow.
 Listen to me and learn what wisdom is.
 Your spearsman is the slave of his weapons; 190
 unless his comrades in the ranks fight well,
 then he dies, killed by their cowardice;
 and once his spear, his sole defense, is smashed,
 he has no means of warding death away.
 But the man whose hands know how to aim the bow, 195
 holds the one best weapon: a thousand arrows shot,
 he still has more to guard himself from death.
 He stands far off, shooting at foes who see
 only the wound the unseen arrow plows,
 while he himself, his body unexposed, 200
 lies screened and safe. This is best in war:
 to preserve yourself and to hurt your foe
 unless he stands secure, beyond your range.
 Such are my arguments, squarely opposed
 to yours on every point at issue here.
 What will you achieve by killing these boys? 205

How have they hurt you? Yet I grant you wise
in one respect: being base yourself,
you fear the children of a noble man.

Still, this goes hard with us, that we must die
to prove your cowardice, a fate which you
might better suffer at our better hands,
if the mind of Zeus intended justice here.

But if the sceptre is what you desire,
then let us go as exiles from the land.

But beware of force, lest you suffer it,
when god swings round again with veering wind.

O country of Cadmus, on you too
my reproaches fall! Is this your vigil
for the sons of Heracles? For Heracles,
who single-handed fought your Minyan foe
and made Thebes see once more with free men's eyes?

No more can I praise Hellas, nor be still,
finding her so craven toward my son:
with sword, spear, and fire she should have come
to help these boys in gratitude to him,
for all his labors clearing land and sea.

Poor children, both Thebes and Hellas fail you.

And so you turn to me, a weak old man,
nothing more now than a jawing of words,
forsaken by that strength I used to have,
left only with this trembling husk of age.

But if my youth and strength could come again,
I'd take my spear and bloody your brown hair
until you ran beyond the bounds of Atlas,
trying, coward, to outrun my spear!

210

215

220

225

230

235

Chorus

There is a source of speech in all brave men
which does not fail, although the tongue be slow.

Lycus

Go on, rant, pile up your tower of words!
My actions, not my words, shall answer your abuse.

HERACLES

(Turning to his attendants.)

Go, men, to Helicon and Parnassus: 240
 tell the woodsmen there to chop up oaken logs
 and haul them to the city. Then pile your wood
 around the altar here on every side,
 and let it blaze. Burn them all alive
 until they learn the dead man rules no more; 245
 that I, and I alone, am the power here.
 But you old men, for this defiance,
 you shall mourn the sons of Heracles
 and each disaster that devours this house, 250
 each separate grief, until you learn
 you are only slaves; I am the master.

Chorus

O sons of earth, men whom Ares sowed,
 teeth he tore from the dragon's foaming jaw,
 up, up with these staffs that prop our arms
 and batter the skull of this godless man, 255
 no Theban, but an alien lording it
 over the younger men, to our great shame!

(To Lycus.)

Never shall you boast that I am your slave,
 never will you reap the harvest of my work,
 all I labored for. Go back whence you came; 260
 rage there. So long as there is life in me,
 you shall not kill the sons of Heracles.
 He has not gone so deep beneath the earth.
 Because you ruined, then usurped, this land,
 he who gave it help must go without his due. 265
 Am I a meddler, then, because I help
 the friend who, being dead, needs help the most?
 O right hand, how you ache to hold a spear,
 but cannot, want foundering on weakness.
 Else, I should have stopped your mouth that calls me
 slave, 270
 and ruled this Thebes, in which you now exult,

with credit. But corrupt with evil schemes
and civil strife, this city lost its mind;
for were it sane, it would not live your slave.

Megara

Old sirs, I thank you. Friends rightly show
just indignation on their friends' behalf.

275

But do not let your rage on our account
involve your ruin too. Amphitryon,
hear what I think for what it may be worth.
I love my children. How not love these boys
born of my labors? I am in terror
of their death. And yet how base a thing it is
when a man will struggle with necessity!

280

We have to die. Then do we have to die
consumed alive, mocked by those we hate?—
for me a worse disaster than to die.

285

Our house and birth demand a better death.
Upon your helm the victor's glory sits,
forbidding that you die a coward's death;
while my husband needs no witnesses to swear
he would not want these sons of his to live
by living cowards. Because it hurts his sons,
disgraces break a man of noble birth;
and I must imitate my husband here.

290

Consider of what stuff your hopes are made;
you think your son will come from underground.

295

Who of all the dead comes home from Hades?
Or do you think you'll mellow *him* with prayers?
No, you must shun a brutal enemy;
yield to noble, understanding men

300

who, met halfway as friends, give mercy freely.

The thought had come to me that prayers might win
the children's banishment; but this is worse,
to preserve them for a life of beggary.

How does the saying go? Hardly one day
do men look kindly on their banished friend.
Dare death with us, which awaits you anyway.

305

H E R A C L E S

By your great soul, I challenge you, old friend.
The man who sticks it out against his fate
shows spirit, but the spirit of a fool.
No man alive can budge necessity.

310

Chorus

I could have stopped the mouth of any man
who threatened you, had I my old strength back.
But now I am nothing. With you it rests,
Amphitryon, to avert disaster now.

315

Amphitryon

Not cowardice, not love of life, keep me
from death, but my hope to save these children.
I am in love, it seems, with what cannot be.

(Turning to Lycus.)

Here, king, here is my throat, ready for your sword;
murder me, stab me through, hurl me from a cliff,
but, I beg you, grant us both this one boon.
Murder us before you kill these children;
spare us from seeing that ghastly sight,
these boys gasping out their lives, crying
“Mother!” and “Grandfather!” For the rest,
do your worst. Our hope is gone; we have to die.

320

325

Megara

I beg you, grant me this one last request,
and so by one act you shall oblige us both.
Let me adorn my children for their death;
open those doors which are locked to us
and give them that much share of their father’s house.

330

Lycus

I grant it. Attendants, undo the bolts!

(Attendants slide open the center doors of the palace.)

Go in and dress. I do not begrudge you clothes.
But when your dressing for your death is done,

319

then I shall give you to the world below.

335

(*Exit Lycus.*)

Megara

Come, my sons, follow your poor mother's steps
into your father's halls. Other men
possess his wealth; we still possess his name.

(*Exit Megara with children.*)

Amphitryon

For nothing, then, O Zeus, you shared my wife!
In vain we called you partner in my son!
Your love is even less than you pretended;
and I, mere man, am nobler than you, great god.
I did not betray the sons of Heracles.
You knew well enough to creep into my bed
and take what was not yours, what no man gave:
what do you know of saving those you love?
You are a callous god or were born unjust!

340

345

(*Exit Amphitryon to palace.*)

Chorus

STROPHE 1

First for joy, the victor's song;
then the dirge; sing *ailinos* for Linos!
So Apollo sings, sweeping with golden pick
his lyre of lovely voice.

350

And so I sing of him
who went in darkness underground—

let him be the son of Zeus,
let him be Amphitryon's—

of him I sing, a dirge of praise,
a crown of song upon his labors.

355

For of noble deeds the praises are
the glory of the dead.

First he cleared the grove of Zeus,
and slew the lion in its lair;
the tawny hide concealed his back,

360

H E R A C L E S

oval of those awful jaws
cowled his golden hair.

ANTISTROPHE 1

Next the centaurs: slaughtered them,
that mountain-ranging savage race,
laid them low with poisoned shafts,
with winged arrows slew them all.

365

Too well the land had known them:
Peneios' lovely rapids,
vast plains, unharvested,
homesteads under Pelion,
and the places near Homole,
whence their cavalry rode forth
with weapons carved of pine,
and tamed all Thessaly.

370

And next he slew the spotted hind
whose antlers grew of golden horn,
that robber-hind, that ravager,
whose horns now gild Oenoë's shrine,
for Artemis the huntress.

375

STROPHE 2

Then mounted to his car
and mastered with the bit
Diomedes' mares, that knew
no bridle, stabled in blood,
greedy jaws champing flesh,
foul mares that fed on men!

380

And thence crossed over
swirling silver, Hebros' waters,
on and on, performing labors
for Mycenae's king.

385

And there by Pelion's headland,
near the waters of Anauros,
his shafts brought Cycnus down,
that stranger-slaying monster,
host of Amphanaia.

390

321

EURIPIDES

ANTISTROPHE 2

Thence among the singing maidens,
western halls' Hesperides.
Plucked among the metal leaves
the golden fruit, and slew
the orchard's dragon-guard
whose tail of amber coiled the trunk
untouchably. He passed below the sea
and set a calmness in the lives of men
whose living is the oar.

395

Under bellied heaven next,
he put his hand as prop:
there in the halls of Atlas,
his manliness held up
heaven's starry halls.

400

405

STROPHE 3

He passed the swelling sea of black,
and fought the Amazonian force
foregathered at Maeotis
where the many rivers meet.
What town of Hellas missed him
as he mustered friends to fight,
to win the warrior women's
gold-encrusted robes, in quest
for a girdle's deadly quarry?
And Hellas won the prize, spoils
of a famous foreign queen,
which now Mycenae keeps.
He seared each deadly hydra-head
of Lerna's thousand-headed hound;
in her venom dipped the shaft
that brought three-bodied Geryon down,
herdsman of Erytheia.

410

415

420

ANTISTROPHE 3

And many races more he ran,
and won in all the victor's crown,

425

HERACLES

whose harbor now is Hades' tears,
the final labor of them all;
there his life is disembarked
in grief. He comes no more.

His friends have left his house,
and Charon's ferry waits
to take his children's lives
the godless, lawless trip of no return.
To your hands your house still turns,
and you are gone!

430

Could I have my youth once more,
could I shake my spear once more
beside the comrades of my youth,
my courage now would champion
yours sons. But youth comes back no more
that blessed me once.

435

440

EPODE

Look: I see the children coming now,
wearing the garments of the grave,
sons of Heracles who once was great;
and there, his wife, drawing her sons
behind her as she comes; and the old man,
father of Heracles. O pitiful sight!
I cannot hold the tears that break
from these old eyes.

445

450

*(Enter Megara from the palace. She is followed
by the children, dressed in the garments of
the dead. Last comes Amphitryon.)*

Megara

Where is the priest with sacrificial knife?
Where is the killer of our wretched lives?
Here the victims stand, ready for Hades.
O my boys, this incongruity of death:
beneath one yoke, old man, children and mother.
How miserably we die, these children and I!

455

E U R I P I D E S

Upon these faces now I look my last.
I gave you birth and brought you up to be
but mocked and murdered by our enemies.

How bitterly my hopes for you have failed,
those hopes I founded on your father's words.

460

(*She turns to each child in turn.*)

To you your father would have left all Argos:
in Eurystheus' halls you would have ruled
and held the sway over rich Pelasgia.

It was upon your head he sometimes threw
the skin of tawny lion that he wore.

465

You, made king of chariot-loving Thebes,
would have inherited your mother's lands,
because you teased them from your father once.

Sometimes in play, he put in your right hand
that carven club he kept for self-defense.

470

To you, he would have left Oechalia,
ravaged once by his far-shooting shafts.

There are three of you, and with three kingdoms
your heroic father would have raised you up.

475

And I had chosen each of you a bride,
from Athens, Thebes, and Sparta, binding our house
by marriage, that having such strong anchors down,
you might in happiness ride out your lives.

Now all is gone, and fortune, veering round,
gives each of you your death as though a bride,
and in my tears your bridal shower is,
while your father's father mourns the feast
that makes you all the sons-in-law of death.

480

Which shall I take first, which of you the last,
to lift you up, take in my arms and kiss?

485

If only I could gather up my tears,
and like the tawny bee from every flower,
distil to one small nectar all my grief!

O dearest Heracles, if any voice
from here reaches to Hades, hear me now!

490

Your sons, your father, are dying . . . and I,

H E R A C L E S

who was once called blessed because of you.
Help us, come! Come, even as a ghost;
even as a dream, your coming would suffice.
For these are cowards who destroy your sons.

495

Amphitryon

Send your prayers, my child, to the world below,
while I hold out my hands to heaven.
We implore you, Zeus, if still you mean to help,
help us now before it is too late. 500
How often have I called! In vain, my labors.
For death is on us like necessity.

Our lives, old friends, are but a little while,
so let them run as sweetly as you can,
and give no thought to grief from day to day.
For time is not concerned to keep our hopes, 505
but hurries on its business, and is gone.
You see in me a man who once had fame,
who did great deeds; but fortune in one day
has snatched it from me as though a feather. 510
Great wealth, great reputation! I know no man
with whom they stay. Friends of my youth, farewell.
You look your last on him who loved you well.

*(Megara suddenly catches sight of Heracles
approaching from a distance.)*

Megara

Look, Father! My dearest! Can it be?

Amphitryon

I cannot say. I dare not say, my child. 515

Megara

It is he, whom we heard was under earth,
unless some dream comes walking in the light.
A dream? This is no dream my longing makes!
It is *he*, Father, your son, no other!
Run, children, fasten to your father's robes 520

E U R I P I D E S

and never let him go! Quick, run! He comes
to rescue us and Zeus comes with him.

(Enter *Heracles*, armed with bow and arrows, his club
in his hand. He does not see his family at
first, but salutes his halls.)

Heracles

I greet my hearth! I hail my house and halls!
How gladly I behold the light once more
and look on you!

525

(He sees his family.)

What is this I see?

my children before the house? with garlands
on their heads? and my wife surrounded
by a crowd of men? my father in tears?
What misfortune makes him cry? I'll go and ask
what disaster now has come upon my house.

530

Megara

O my dearest. . . .

Amphitryon

O daylight returning!

Megara

You come, alive, in time to rescue us!

Heracles

Father, what has happened? What does this mean?

Megara

Murder. Forgive me, Father, if I snatch
and speak the words that you should rightly say.
I am a woman: anguish hurts me more,
and my children were being put to death. . . .

535

Heracles

Apollo! what a prelude to your tale!

H E R A C L E S

Megara

My father is dead. My brothers are dead.

Heracles

What! How did they die? Who killed them?

54°

Megara

Murdered by Lycus, the upstart tyrant.

Heracles

In revolution? Or civil war?

Megara

Civil war. Now he rules our seven gates.

Heracles

But why should you and my father be afraid?

Megara

He planned to kill us: your sons, father, and me.

545

Heracles

What had he to fear from my orphaned sons?

Megara

Lest they take revenge some day for Creon's death.

Heracles

But why these garments? Why are they dressed for death?

Megara

It was for our own deaths we put them on.

Heracles

You would have died by violence? O gods!

55°

Megara

We had no friends. We heard that you were dead.

Heracles

How did you come to give up hope for me?

Megara

The heralds of Eurystheus proclaimed you dead.

Heracles

Why did you abandon my house and hearth?

Megara

By force. He dragged your father from his bed.

555

Heracles

He had no shame, but so dishonored age?

Megara

Lycus have shame? He knows no such goddess.

Heracles

And were my friends so scarce when I was gone?

Megara

In misfortune, what friend remains a friend?

Heracles

They thought so little of my Minyan wars?

560

Megara

Again I say, misfortune has no friends.

Heracles

Rip from your heads those wreaths of Hades!
 Lift your faces to the light; with seeing eyes,
 take your sweet reprieve from death and darkness.
 And I—a task for my one hand alone—
 shall go and raze this upstart tyrant's house,
 cut off that blaspheming head and give it
 to the dogs to paw. All those men of Thebes

565

who took my goodness and returned me ill—
 this bow with which I won the victor's crown
 shall slaughter them with rain of winged shafts.
 till all Ismenus chokes upon the corpses
 and Dirce's silver waters run with blood.

570

What should I defend if not my wife and sons
 and my old father? Farewell, my labors!
 for wrongly I preferred you more than these.
 They would have died for me, and I should die
 in their defense. Or is this bravery,
 to do Eurystheus' orders and contend
 with lions and hydras, and not to struggle
 for my children's lives? From this time forth,
 call me no more "Heracles the victor."

575

580

Chorus

This is right, that a man defend his sons,
 his aged father, and his wedded wife.

Amphitryon

My son, it is like you to love your friends
 and hate your foe. But do not act too fast.

585

Heracles

How do I act faster than I should?

Amphitryon

The king has henchmen, a mob of needy men
 who pass themselves off for men of wealth.
 These men, their substance drained away by sloth
 and spending, have promoted civil strife
 and wrecked the state to mulct their neighbors.
 You were seen coming here. Beware therefore
 lest your enemy be stronger than you guess.

590

Heracles

I do not care if all the city saw me!
 But seeing a bird in some foreboding place,

595

I guessed some trouble had fallen on my house,
and thus forewarned, I entered secretly.

Amphitryon

Good. Go now, enter your house and greet your hearth.
Look on your father's house; let it behold you. 600
Shortly the king will come to hale us off
and slaughter us: your wife, your sons, and me.
Wait here, and everything shall come to hand;
with safety too. But let the city go,
my son, until we finish matters here. 605

Heracles

You advise me well. I will go within.
I owe first greetings to my household gods
because they brought me home from sunless caves
of Kore and Hades. I shall not slight them.

Amphitryon

Did you really descend to Hades, son? 610

Heracles

Yes; I brought back the triple-headed dog.

Amphitryon

You subdued him? or was he the goddess' gift?

Heracles

Subdued him. Luck was mine: I saw the mysteries.

Amphitryon

And is the monster at Eurystheus' house?

Heracles

No, at Hermione, in Demeter's grove. 615

Amphitryon

Does Eurystheus know of your return above?

H E R A C L E S

Heracles

No, I came here first to learn of you.

Amphitryon

Why did you delay so long underground?

Heracles

To save Theseus from Hades, Father.

Amphitryon

Where is he now? Gone to his native land?

620

Heracles

He went to Athens, rejoicing to be free.

(*He turns and addresses his children.*)

Follow your father to the house, my sons,
for this, your going in, shall be more fair
than your coming out. Put your fears away,
and stop those tears that well up in your eyes.

625

And you, dear wife, gather your courage up,
tremble no more, and let my garments go.

I have no wings to fly from those I love.

Look:

They will not let me go, but clutch my clothes
more tightly. How close you came to death!

630

(*He sets down his bow and club and takes
his children by the hands.*)

Here, I'll take your hands and lead you in my wake,
like a ship that tows its little boats behind,
for I accept this care and service
of my sons. Here all mankind is equal:
rich and poor alike, they love their children.
With wealth distinctions come: some possess it,

635

some do not. All mankind loves its children.

(*Exit Heracles with the children, followed
by Megara and Amphitryon.*)

EURIPIDES

Chorus

STROPHE 1

Youth I long for always.
 But old age lies on my head,
 a weight more heavy than Aetna's rocks;
 darkness hides
 the light of my eyes. 640
 Had I the wealth of an Asian king,
 or a palace crammed with gold,
 both would I give for youth,
 loveliest in wealth,
 in poverty, loveliest.
 But old age I loathe: ugly,
 murderous. Let the waves take it
 so it comes no more to the homes
 and cities of men! Let the wind
 whirl it away forever! 645
 650

ANTISTROPHE 1

If the gods were wise and understood
 what human wisdom understands, 655
 second youth would be their gift,
 to seal the goodness of a man.
 And so, conspicuous of life,
 the good would run their race to death
 and double back to light again. 660
 But evil men should live their lap,
 one single life, and run no more.
 By such a sign all men would know
 the wicked from the good,
 as when the clouds are broken 665
 and the sailor sees the stars.
 But now the gods have put
 between the noble and the base
 no clear distinction down.
 And time and age go wheeling on,
 exalting only wealth. 670

H E R A C L E S

STROPHE 2

Never shall I cease from this.
Muses with the Graces joining,
loveliness in yoke together.
I may not live without the Muses.
Let my head be always crowned!
May my old age always sing
of Memory, the Muses' mother,
always shall I sing the crown
of Heracles the victor!
So long as these remain—
Dionysus' gift of wine,
the lyre of seven strings
the shrilling of the flute—
never shall I cease to sing,
Muses who made me dance!

675

680

685

ANTISTROPHE 2

Paeans sing the Delian maidens,
a song for Leto's lovely son,
wheeling at the temple gates
the lovely mazes of the dance.
So paeans at your gate I raise,
pouring like the dying swan,
from hoary throat a song of praise.
I have a noble theme of song:
He is the son of Zeus!
But far beyond his birth,
his courage lifts him up,
whose labors gave this mortal calm,
who cleared away the beasts.

690

695

700

(Enter Lycus, with attendants. Amphitryon
emerges from the palace.)

Lycus

None too soon, Amphitryon, have you appeared.
A long time now you've spent in dallying
with your robes and ornaments of death.

Go, call the wife and sons of Heracles
and bid them show themselves before the house.
On those terms, I let you clothe yourselves for death.

705

Amphitryon

King, you persecute in me a wretched man,
and by abusing us, you wrong the dead.
King you may be, but tread more gently here.
Death is your decree, and we accept it
as we must. As you decide, then so must we.

710

Lycus

Where is Megara? Where are the children?

Amphitryon

To chance a guess from here outside, I think . . .

Lycus

Well, what do you think? What makes you think so?

Amphitryon

. . . kneels at the hearth and makes her prayers . . .

715

Lycus

If she asks for life, her prayers are pointless.

Amphitryon

. . . and implores in vain her husband to come.

Lycus

He is not here to help. He will not come.

Amphitryon

Not unless some god restore him to us.

Lycus

Go inside and fetch her from the house.

720

Amphitryon

Then I should be accomplice in her death.

Lycus

Very well then. Since your scruples forbid,
I, who lack such petty fears, shall go and fetch
the mother and her sons. Attend me, guards,
and help me put good riddance to this chore.

725

(Exit *Lycus*, attended by guards, into the palace.)

Amphitryon

Go, march in to your fate. Someone, I think,
will see you in. Expect for what you did
evil in return. How justly, old friends,
into that net whose meshes hide the sword,
he goes, the man who would have slaughtered us,
coward that he is! I'll go in and watch
his body fall. This is sweet: to see your foe
perish and pay to justice all he owes.

730

(Exit *Amphitryon* into the palace.)

STROPHE 1

Chorus

Disaster is reversed!
The tyrant's life turns back to Hades!
Justice flows back! O fate of the gods,
returning!

735

Your time has come. You go now where the price
for outrage on your betters must be paid.

740

Joy once more! Overboard with grief!
The king has come again!
He has come, of whom I had no hope,
my country's king, come back again!

745

Peer within the house, old friends. Let me see
if what I hope to see is taking place.

Lycus

(Within.)

Help! Help!

Chorus

ANTISTROPHE 1

From within the song begins
 I long to hear. That cry
 was prelude to his death:
 the tyrant's death is near.

750

Lycus

O land of Cadmus! Treachery! I die!

Chorus

Die: you would have killed. Show your boldness now
 as you repay to justice all you owe.

755

What lying mortal made that fable
 that mindless tale
 that slander on the blessed?
 Who denied the gods are strong?

Old friends, the godless man is dead!
 The house is silent. Turn to the dances!
 Those I love now prosper as I hoped.

760

STROPHE 2

Let dance and feasting now prevail
 throughout this holy town of Thebes!
 Joy and mourning change their places,
 old disaster turns to dancing!

765

Change now rings my change of song!
 The new king runs to death, the old king rules!
 Our king runs home from Hades' harbor!
 He comes again, he comes, my king and hope,
 of whom my hope despaired.

770

H E R A C L E S

ANTISTROPHE 2

The gods of heaven do prevail:
they raise the good and scourge the bad.
Excess of happiness—it drives
men's minds awry; in its train
comes on corrupted power.
No man foresees the final stretch of time.
Evil lures him, justice races by,
until he wrecks at last the somber car
that holds his happiness.

775

780

STROPHE 3

O Ismenus, come with crowns!
Dance and sing: you gleaming streets
of seven-gated Thebes!
Come, O Dirce, lovely river,
leave your father's waters, bring
the nymphs, Asopus' daughters!
Come and sing the famous crown
of Heracles the victor!
O wooded crag of Delphi,
O Muses' homes on Helicon!
make my city's walls resound,
echo back the joy of Thebes,
city where the sown men rose
with shields of bronze, where still
their children's children dwell,
a blessed light to Thebes!

785

790

795

ANTISTROPHE 3

O marriage-bed two bridegrooms shared!
One was man; the other, Zeus,
who entered in the bridal bed
and with Alcmene lay.
How true, O Zeus, that marriage
proves to be! Your part therein,
against all doubt, is proven true!
For time at last has clearly shown the strength

800

805

of Heracles the hero.
 He made his way from Pluto's halls;
 he left the dungeon underground.
 He is to me a better king
 than that ignoble lord: 810
 comparison made plain
 in the struggle of the sword,
 if justice still finds favor
 among the blessed gods.

(*A crash of thunder. The figure of Madness, gorgon-faced and holding a goad, appears in a black chariot on the roof of the palace. On the other side of the roof Iris is seen.*)

Ah! Ah! 815
 Is the same terror on us all?
 Look, old friends: what phantom hovers on the house?

Fly, fly!
 Stir your heavy limbs! Back, away!

Lord Paian, help us! Avert disaster! 820

Iris

Courage, old men. You see there, Madness,
 child of night, and me, servant of the gods,
 Iris. We bring no harm upon your city.
 Against one man alone our war is waged, 825
 him whom men call Alcmene's son by Zeus.
 Until his bitter labors had been done,
 his fate preserved him; nor would father Zeus
 let me or Hera do him any harm.

But now Eurystheus' orders have been done,
 Hera plans, by making him destroy his sons, 830
 to taint him with fresh murder; and I agree.

Up, then, unmarried child of blackest Night,
 rouse up, harden that relentless heart,
 send madness on this man, confound his mind

835

and make him kill his sons. Madden his feet;
 drive him, goad him, shake out the sails of death
 and speed his passage over Acheron,
 where he must take his crown of lovely sons.
 Let him learn what Hera's anger is,
 and what is mine. For the gods are nothing,
 and men prevail, if this one man escape.

840

Madness

I was born of noble birth: my mother
 is the Night, and my father, Uranus.
 My functions make me loathsome to the gods,
 nor do I gladly visit men I love. 845
 And I advise both you and Hera now,
 lest I see you stumble, to hear me out.
 This man against whose house you drive me on
 has won great fame on earth and with the gods.
 He reclaimed the pathless earth and raging sea,
 and he alone held up the honors of the gods
 when they wilted at the hands of evil men.
 I advise you: renounce these wicked plans.

850

Iris

Hera's scheme and mine need no advice from you. 855

Madness

I would place you on the better path: you choose the
 worse.

Iris

Hera has not sent you down to show your sanity.

Madness

O Sun, be my witness: I act against my will.
 But since I must perform the service you and Hera ask,
 in full cry, like the hound that bays the huntsman,
 go I will: to the heart of Heracles I run,
 more fast, more wild than ocean's groaning breakers go,

860

than earthquake, or the thunder's agonizing crack!
 I shall batter through the roof and leap upon the house!
 He shall kill his sons and, killing, shall not know
 he kills what he begot, until my madness leave him. 865

Look: already, head writhing, he leaps the starting-post;
 jumps and now stops; his eyeballs bulge, and pupils roll;
 his breath comes heaving up, a bull about to charge!
 And now he bellows up the horrid fates from hell; 870
 he groans and shouts; he dances to the pipes of terror!
 Soar to Olympus, Iris, on your honored way,
 while I now sink, unseen, to the house of Heracles.

*(Iris and Madness disappear. As they go, a weird
 piping of the flute begins, now soft, now
 loud, broken in rhythm, pitched in-
 sanely, and then suddenly still.)*

Chorus

O city, mourn! Your flower 875
 is cut down, the son of Zeus.
 O Hellas, mourn! You have lost
 your savior! He dances now
 to the fatal flutes of madness!

Madness has mounted her car;
 she goads her team! 880
 she drives for death!
 O gorgon of Night, O hiss
 of a hundred snakes! O Madness,
 whose look makes stones of men!

Instantly, god's fortune is reversed!
 Instantly, and father murders sons! 885

Amphitryon

O horror!

(Within:)

Chorus

O Zeus, your son has lost his sons!

H E R A C L E S

Vengeance, mad, implacable, exacts
the penalty! Disaster lays him low!

890

Amphitryon
O my house!

Chorus

Now the dance begins! Not here,
the drums! no lovely thyrsos here!

Amphitryon
O my home!

Chorus

For blood, she drives, for blood!
No wine of Dionysus here!

895

Amphitryon
Fly, children, save yourselves!

Chorus

Horrid,
horrid piping of the flute!
His sons, he hunts them down!
Madness through the house,
madness dancing death!

Amphitryon
O grief!

900

Chorus

I grieve for those two,
for the old man, for the mother
who bore, who nursed her sons in vain!

Look, look!
Whirlwind shakes the house, the roof falls!

905

Ah! on the roof!
 O daughter of Zeus, what do you do?
 You have brought upon this house
 ruin that reaches to hell,
 as once you ruined Enceladus!

(A messenger appears from the palace.)

Messenger

O bodies blanched with age. . . .

910

Chorus

Why that cry?

Messenger

Horror in the house!

Chorus

O my prophetic fears!

Messenger

The children live no more.

Chorus

Ah. . . .

Messenger

Mourn them, grieve them.

Chorus

Cruel murder,

O cruel hands of a father!

915

Messenger

No words could tell what we have seen.

Chorus

How did it happen, how this madness,
 children killed by a father's hands?

How did disaster strike, madness

hurled from heaven on this house?
How did those pitiful children die?

920

Messenger

Offerings to Zeus were set before the hearth
to purify the house, for Heracles
had cast the body of the king outside.

There the children stood, in lovely cluster,
with Megara and the old man. In holy hush
the basket made the circle of the hearth.

And then, as Heracles reached out his hand
to take the torch and dip it in the water,
he stood stock-still. There he stood, not moving,
while the children stared. Suddenly he changed:
his eyes rolled and bulged from their sockets,
and the veins stood out, gorged with blood, and froth
began to trickle down his bearded chin.

Then he spoke, laughing like a maniac:
“Why hallow fire, Father, to cleanse the house
before I kill Eurystheus? Why double work,
when at one blow I might complete my task?
I’ll go and fetch Eurystheus’ head, add it
to that other corpse, then purify my hands.”

Empty your water out! Drop those baskets!
Someone fetch my bow. Put weapons in my hands:
I march against Mycenae! Let me have
crowbars and picks: the Cyclopes built well,
cramping stone on stone with plumb and mallet,
but with my pick I’ll rip them down again.”

Then he fancied that his chariot stood there;
he made as though to leap its rails, and rode off,
prodding with his hand as though it held a goad.

Whether to laugh or shudder, we could not tell.
We stared at one another. Then one man asked,
“Is the master playing, or is he . . . mad?”
Up and down, throughout the house, he drove,
and riding through the great hall, claimed it was
Nisus’ city, though it was, in fact, his house.

925

930

935

940

945

950

955

EURIPIDES

He threw himself to the floor, and acted out
 a feast. He tarried there a while, then said
 he was approaching Isthmus' wooded valley.
 He unstrapped his buckles and stripped himself bare,
 and wrestled with no one; then called for silence 960
 and crowned himself the victor of a match
 that never was. Then raged against Eurystheus,
 and said he'd come to Mycenae. His father
 caught him by that muscled hand and said:
 "What do you mean, my son? What is this journey 965
 that you make? Or has the blood of those you've slain
 made you mad?" He thought Eurystheus' father
 had come, trembling, to supplicate his hand;
 pushed him away, and set his bow and arrows
 against his sons. He thought he was killing 970
 Eurystheus' children. Trembling with terror,
 they rushed here and there; one hid beneath
 his mother's robes, one ran to the shadow
 of a pillar, and the last crouched like a bird
 below the altar. Their mother shrieked:
 "You are their father! Will you kill your sons?" 975
 And shouts broke from the old man and the slaves.
 Around the pillar he pursued his son
 in dreadful circles, then caught up with him
 and pierced him to the heart. Backward he fell,
 dying, and stained the flagstones with his blood. 980
 His father shouted in triumph, exulting,
 "Here is the first of Eurystheus' youngsters dead;
 his death repays me for his father's hate."
 He aimed his bow at the second, who crouched
 below the altar's base, trying to hide. 985
 The boy leaped first, fell at his father's knees
 and held his hand up to his father's chin.
 "Dearest Father," he cried, "do not murder me.
 I am your own son, yours, not Eurystheus'!"
 But he stared from stony gorgon eyes, 990
 found his son too close to draw the bow,
 and brought his club down on that golden head,

H E R A C L E S

and smashed the skull, as though a blacksmith smiting steel. Now that his second son lay dead, he rushed to kill the single victim left. 995

But before he drew the bow, the mother seized her child, ran within and locked the doors. And, as though these were the Cyclopean walls, he pried the panels up, ripped out the jambs, and with one arrow brought down son and wife. 1000

And then he rushed to kill his father too, but look! a phantom came—or so it seemed to us—Pallas, with plumed helm, brandishing a spear. She hurled a rock; it struck him on the chest, stopped short his murderous rage and knocked him into sleep. He slumped to the floor and hit his back against a pillar which had fallen there, snapped in two pieces when the roof collapsed. 1005

Delivered from the fear that made us run, we helped the old man lash him down with ropes against the pillar, lest when he awakes still greater grief be added to the rest. 1010

He sleeps now, wretched man, no happy sleep, killer of his wife and sons. I do not know one man alive more miserable than this. 1015

(Exit messenger.)

Chorus

The hill of Argos had a murder once
Danaus' daughters did, murder's byword,
unbelievable in Hellas!
But murder here has far outrun,
surpassed by far
that ancient crime. 1020

And Procne's noble son was slain,
murdered by his mother's hands and made,
I say, the Muses' sacrifice.
She had but that one son,
while you, poor wretch, had three,
all murdered by your madness.

What dirge, what song
shall I sing for the dead?
What dance shall I dance for death?

1025

(The great central doors of the palace slide slowly apart revealing, in the center court, Heracles asleep, bound to a broken pillar. The bodies of Megara and the children beside him are wheeled on the stage in the eccyclema.)

Ah, look!
Look: the great doors
of the palace slide apart!

1030

Look there!
Look: the children's corpses
beside their wretched father.
How terribly he lies asleep
after his children's slaughter!

Ropes around his body,
knotted cords bind Heracles,
cables lash him down
to the pillars of his house.

1035

Here the old man comes, dragging behind
with heavy steps, mourning in bitterness
like some bird whose unfledged covey is slain.

1040

Amphitryon
Hush, old men of Cadmus' city,
and let him sleep. Hush:
let him forget his grief.

Chorus
I weep for you, old friend,
for these boys, and for that head
that wore the victor's crown.

1045

H E R A C L E S

Amphitryon

Stand further off: not a sound,
not a cry. His sleep is deep,
his sleep is calm. Let him lie.

Chorus

What murder . . .

1050

Amphitryon

Hush! Be still: you add but grief.

Chorus

. . . poured out, piled high!

Amphitryon

Softly, gently, old friends. Mourn
in quiet: not a word, not a cry.
If he awakes and breaks his bonds,
he will destroy us all:
father, city, and his house.

1055

Chorus

I cannot hold my grief.

Amphitryon

Hush:
let me hear his breathing.

Chorus

Does he sleep?

1060

Amphitryon

He sleeps, but sleeps
as dead men do, because he slew his wife
and killed his sons with twanging bow.

Chorus

Grieve then, mourn!

Amphitryon

I mourn, I grieve.

1065

Chorus

Mourn for these dead children.

Amphitryon

Ah. . . .

Chorus

Mourn your son, grieve for him.

Amphitryon

Ah. . . .

Chorus

Old friend. . . .

Amphitryon

Hush, be still:

he stirs and turns! He wakes! Quick,
let me hide myself in darkness here.

1070

Chorus

Courage: darkness lies upon his eyes.

*Amphitryon*Take care, take care. My grief is such,
I have no fear to leave the light and die.
But if he murders me who begot him,
he shall add a greater grief to these,
and have on him the curse of father's blood.

1075

*Chorus*Best for you it would have been
if you had died that very day
you took revenge on those who slew
the kinsmen of your wife, the day
you sacked the city of the Taphians!

1080

HERACLES

Amphitryon

Run, run, old friends, back from the house,
away! He wakes! Run, run
from his reawakened rage!
He wakes to pile murder on murder,
to dance madness through all Thebes!

1085

Chorus

O Zeus, why have you hated him so much,
your own son? Why launched him on this sea of grief?

Heracles

How now?

I do breathe . . . what I ought to see, I see:
heaven and earth, the gleaming shafts of the sun. . . . 1090
But how strangely my muddled senses swim,
as on a choppy sea . . . my breath comes warm,
torn up unsteadily from heaving lungs. . . .

And look: I sit here, like a ship lashed tight
with cables binding my chest and arms, 1095
moored to a piece of broken masonry;
and there, close beside me, corpses lie . . .
and my bow and arrows littered on the ground;
those faithful former comrades of my arms,
that guarded my chest, and I guarded them. 1100

Have I come back to Hades? Have I run
Eurystheus' race again? Hades? But how?
No, for I see no rock of Sisyphus,
no Pluto, no queen Demeter's sceptre.
I am bewildered. Where could I be helpless? 1105

Help! Is there some friend of mine, near or far,
who could help me in my bewilderment?
For all I took for granted now seems strange. . . .

Amphitryon

Old friends, shall I approach my affliction?

Chorus

Go, and I'll go with you, sharing in your grief. 1110

Heracles

Why do you cry, Father, and hide your eyes?
 Why do you stand off from the son you love?

Amphitryon

O my son, my son, whatever you have done. . . .

Heracles

What have I done that you should weep for it?

Amphitryon

Even a god would weep, if he knew it.

1115

Heracles

A great grief it must be; but you hide it.

Amphitryon

It is there to see, if you could but see it.

Heracles

Tell me if you mean my life is not the same.

Amphitryon

Tell me if you are sane; then I shall speak.

Heracles

O gods, how ominous these questions are!

1120

Amphitryon

I wonder even now if you are not mad. . . .

Heracles

Mad? I cannot remember being mad.

Amphitryon

Friends, shall I loose his ropes? What should I do?

Heracles

Tell me who bound me! Who disgraced me so?

H E R A C L E S

Amphitryon

Your troubles are enough. Let the others go.

1125

Heracles

I say no more. Will you tell me now?

Amphitryon

O Zeus, do you see these deeds Hera has done?

Heracles

Is it from *her* hate our sufferings come?

Amphitryon

Let the goddess go. Shoulder your own grief.

Heracles

I am ruined. Your words will be disaster.

1130

(*Amphitryon removes the shrouds from the children's corpses.*)

Amphitryon

Look. Look at the bodies of your children.

Heracles

Oh horrible! What awful sight is this?

Amphitryon

Your unnatural war against your sons.

Heracles

War? What war do you mean? Who killed these boys?

Amphitryon

You and your bow and some god are all guilty.

1135

Heracles

What! I did it? O Father, herald of evil!

Amphitryon

You were mad. Your questions asked for grief.

Heracles

And it was I who murdered wife as well?

Amphitryon

All this was the work of your hand alone.

Heracles

O black night of grief which covers me!

1140

Amphitryon

It was because of that you saw me weep.

Heracles

Did I ruin all my house in my madness?

Amphitryon

I know but this: everything you have is grief.

Heracles

Where did my madness take me? Where did I die?

Amphitryon

By the altar, as you purified your hands.

1145

Heracles

Why then am I so sparing of this life,
born the killer of my dearest sons?

Let me avenge my children's murder:
let me hurl myself down from some sheer rock,
or drive the whetted sword against my side,
or expunge with fire this body's madness
and burn away this guilt which sticks to my life!

1150

(*He glances to the right and sees Theseus approaching.*)

But look: Theseus comes, my friend and kinsman,
intruding on my strategies for death.

H E R A C L E S

And seeing me, the taint of murdered sons
shall enter at the eye of my dearest friend. 1155
What shall I do? Where can this shame be hid?
Oh for wings to fly! to plunge beneath the earth!
Here: let my garments hide my head in darkness,
in shame, in horror of this deed I did, 1160
and so concealed, I'll shelter him from harm,
and keep pollution from the innocent.

(Enter *Theseus, unattended.*)

Theseus

I come, old man, leading the youth of Athens,
bringing alliance to your son; my men
wait under arms by the stream of Asopos. 1165
A rumor came to Erechtheus' city
that Lycus had seized the sceptre of this land
and was engaged in war against your house.
And so, in gratitude to Heracles
who saved me from Hades, I have come, 1170
old man, if you should need a helping hand.

(He sees the corpses of the children.)

Ah!

What bodies are these scattered on the ground?
Have I arrived too late, preceded here
by some disaster? Who killed these boys?
That woman lying there, whose wife was she? 1175
Children are not mustered on the field of war:
no, this is some newer sorrow I find here.

Amphitryon

O lord of the olive-bearing hill. . . .

Theseus

Why do you speak in those heavy tones of grief?

Amphitryon

See what grief the gods have given. 1180

Theseus

Whose children are these over whom you mourn?

*Amphitryon*O gods, my son begot these boys,
begot them, killed them, his own blood.*Theseus*

Unsay those words!

Amphitryon

Would that I could!

1185

Theseus

Oh horrible tale!

Amphitryon

We are ruined and lost.

Theseus

How did it happen? Tell me how.

*Amphitryon*Dead in the blow of madness,
by arrows dipped in the blood
of the hundred-headed hydra. . . .

1190

Theseus

This is Hera's war. Who lies there by the bodies?

*Amphitryon*My son, my most unhappy son,
who fought with giant-killing spear
beside the gods at Phlegraia.*Theseus*

What mortal man was ever cursed like this?

1195

Amphitryon

Among all men you would not find,

H E R A C L E S

greater wretchedness, greater suffering
than this.

Theseus

Why does he hide his head beneath his robes?

Amphitryon

Shame of meeting your eye,
shame before friends and kin,
shame for his murdered sons.

1200

Theseus

I come to share his grief. Uncover him.

Amphitryon

My son, drop your robe from your eyes,
show your forehead to the sun.

1205

A friend has come, a rival weight
to counterpoise your grief.

O my son, I implore you,
by your beard, your knees, your hand,
by an old man's tears:
tame that lion of your rage
that roars you on to death,
yoking grief to grief.

1210

Theseus

I call on you, huddled there in misery:
lift up your head and show your face to friends.

1215

There is no cloud whose utter blackness
could conceal in night a sorrow like yours.

Why wave me off, warning me of blood?
Are you afraid mere words would pollute me?

What do I care if your misfortunes fall
on me? You were my good fortune once:

you saved me from the dead, brought me back to light.

I loathe a friend whose gratitude grows old,
a friend who takes his friend's prosperity

but will not voyage with him in his grief.
 Rise up; uncover that afflicted head
 and look on us. This is courage in a man:
 to bear unflinchingly what heaven sends.

1225

(*He raises Heracles to his feet and uncovers his head.*)

Heracles

Theseus, have you seen this field of fallen sons?

Theseus

I heard. I see the grief to which you point.

1230

Heracles

How could you then uncloak me to the sun?

Theseus

No mortal man can stain what is divine.

Heracles

Away, rash friend! Flee my foul pollution.

Theseus

Where there is love contagion cannot come.

Heracles

I thank you. How right I was to help you once.

1235

Theseus

You saved me then, and now I pity you.

Heracles

A man to be pitied: I slew my children.

Theseus

My tears, my gratitude, I mourn your grief.

Heracles

Have you ever seen more misery than this?

H E R A C L E S

Theseus

Your wretchedness towers up and touches heaven.

1240

Heracles

Then where it touches heaven, I shall strike.

Theseus

What do you think the gods care for your threats?

Heracles

Heaven is proud. And I am proud to heaven.

Theseus

No more: your presumption will be punished.

Heracles

My hold is full: there is no room for more.

1245

Theseus

What will you do? Where does your passion run?

Heracles

To death: to go back whence I came, beneath the earth.

Theseus

These are the words of an ordinary man.

Heracles

Will you, who did not suffer, preach to me?

Theseus

Is this that Heracles who endured so much?

1250

Heracles

Not so much. Endurance has an end.

Theseus

Mankind's benefactor, man's greatest friend?

Heracles

What good are men to me? Hera rules.

Theseus

You die so mean a death? Hellas forbids it.

Heracles

Listen: let me tell you what makes a mock
at your advice. Let me show you my life:
a life not worth living now, or ever.

1255

Take my father first, a man who killed
my mother's father and having such a curse,
married Alcmene who gave birth to me.

1260

When a house is built on poor foundations,
then its descendants are the heirs of grief.

Then Zeus—whoever Zeus may be—begot me
for Hera's hatred. Take no offense, old man,
for I count you my father now, not Zeus.

1265

While I was still at suck, she set her snakes
with gorgon eyes to slither in my crib
and strangle me. And when I grew older
and a belt of muscle bound my body—
why recite all those labors I endured?

1270

All those wars I fought, those beasts I slew,
those lions and triple-bodied Typhons,
giants, and four-legged Centaur hordes!

I killed the hydra, that hound whose heads
grew back as soon as lopped. My countless labors done,
I descended down among the sullen dead
to do Eurystheus' bidding and bring to light
the triple-headed hound who guards the gates of hell.

1275

And now my last worst labor has been done:
I slew my children and crowned my house with grief.

1280

And this is how I stand: I cannot stay
with those I love at Thebes. If I remain,
what temple, what assembly of my friends
will have me? My curse is unapproachable.

Go to Argos then? No, I am banished there.

1285

H E R A C L E S

Settle in some other city then,
where notoriety shall pick me out
to be watched and goaded by bitter gibes—
“Is this the son of Zeus, who killed his wife
and sons? Away with him! Let him die elsewhere.” 1290
[To a man who prospers and is blessed,
all change is grief; but the man who lives
akin to trouble minds disaster less.]
But to this pitch of grief my life has come:
the earth itself will groan, forbidding me 1295
to touch the ground, rivers and seas cry out
against my crossing-over, and I am
like Ixion, bound forever to a wheel.
This is the best, that I be seen no more
in Hellas, where I prospered and was great. 1300
Why should I live? What profit have I,
having a life both useless and accursed?
Let the noble wife of Zeus begin the dance,
pounding with her feet Olympus’ gleaming floors!
For she accomplished what her heart desired, 1305
and hurled the greatest man of Hellas down
in utter ruin. Who could offer prayers
to such a goddess? Jealous of Zeus
for a mortal woman’s sake, she has destroyed
Hellas’ greatest friend, though he was guiltless. 1310

Theseus

No other god is implicated here,
except the wife of Zeus. Rightly you judge.
My advice is this: be patient, suffer
what you must, and do not yield to grief.
Fate exempts no man; all men are flawed,
and so the gods, unless the poets lie. 1315
Do not the gods commit adultery?
Have they not cast their fathers into chains,
in pursuit of power? Yet all the same,
despite their crimes, they live upon Olympos.
How dare you then, mortal that you are, 1320

E U R I P I D E S

to protest your fate, when the gods do not?

Obey the law and leave your native Thebes
and follow after me to Pallas' city.

There I shall purify your hands of blood,
give you a home and a share of my wealth.

All those gifts I have because I killed
the Minotaur and saved twice seven youths,
I cede to you. Everywhere throughout my land,
plots of earth have been reserved for me.

These I now assign to you, to bear your name
until you die. And when you go to Hades,
Athens shall raise you up a monument
of stone, and honor you with sacrifice.

And so my city, helping a noble man,
shall win from Hellas a lovely crown of fame.

This thanks and this return I make you now,
who saved me once. For now you need a friend.
[He needs no friends who has the love of gods.
For when god helps a man, he has help enough.]

1325

1330

1335

Heracles

Ah, all this has no bearing on my grief;
but I do not believe the gods commit
adultery, or bind each other in chains.

I never did believe it; I never shall;
nor that one god is tyrant of the rest.

If god is truly god, he is perfect,
lacking nothing. These are poets' wretched lies.

1340

Even in my misery I asked myself,
would it not be cowardice to die?

The man who cannot bear up under fate
could never face the weapons of a man.

I shall prevail against death. I shall go
to your city. I accept your countless gifts.
For countless were the labors I endured;

never yet have I refused, never yet
have I wept, and never did I think
that I should come to this: tears in my eyes.

1345

1350

1355

H E R A C L E S

But now, I see, I must serve necessity.

And now you see me banished, old man;
you see in me the killer of my sons.

Give them to the grave, give them the tribute
of your tears, for the law forbids me this.

Let them lie there in their mother's arms,
united in their grief, as they were then,
before, in ignorance, I killed them all.

And when the earth conceals their small remains,
live on in this city here, and though it hurt,
compel your soul to bear misfortune with me.

O my sons, the father who gave you life
has slain you all, and never shall you reap
that harvest of my life, all I labored for,
that heritage of fame I toiled to leave you.
You too, poor wife, I killed: unkind return
for having kept the honor of my bed,
for all your weary vigil in my house.

O wretched wife and sons! Wretched father!
In grief I now unyoke myself from you.
O bitter sweetness of this last embrace!

*(He turns from his final farewell to his wife and
children and picks up his bow and arrows.)*

O my weapons, bitter partners of my life!

What shall I do? Let you go, or keep you,
knocking against my ribs and always saying,

"With us you murdered wife and sons. Wearing us,
you wear your children's killers." Can that be worn?

What could I reply? Yet, naked of these arms,
with which I did the greatest deeds in Hellas,
must I die in shame at my enemies' hands?

No, they must be borne; but in pain I bear them.

Hold with me, Theseus, in one thing more.
Help me take to Argos the monstrous dog,
lest, alone and desolate of sons, I die.

O land of Cadmus, O people of Thebes,
mourn with me, grieve with me, attend my children

1360

1365

1370

1375

1380

1385

1390

to the grave! And with one voice mourn us all,
the dead and me. For all of us have died,
all struck down by one blow of Hera's hate.

Theseus

Rise up, unfortunate friend. Have done with tears.

Heracles

I cannot rise. My limbs are rooted here.

1395

Theseus

Then necessity breaks even the strong.

Heracles

Oh to be a stone! To feel no grief!

Theseus

Enough. Give your hand to your helping friend.

Heracles

Take care. I may pollute your clothes with blood.

Theseus

Pollute them then. Spare not. I do not care.

1400

Heracles

My sons are dead; now you shall be my son.

Theseus

Place your hand on my shoulder. I shall lead you.

Heracles

A yoke of love, but one of us in grief.
O Father, choose a man like this for friend.

Amphitryon

The land that gave him birth has noble sons.

1405

Heracles

Theseus, turn me back. Let me see my sons.

H E R A C L E S

Theseus

Is this a remedy to ease your grief?

Heracles

I long for it, yearn to embrace my father.

Amphitryon

My arms are waiting. I too desire it.

Theseus

Have you forgotten your labors so far?

1410

Heracles

All those labors I endured were less than these.

Theseus

If someones sees your weakness, he will not praise you.

Heracles

I live: am I so low? You did not think so once.

Theseus

Once, no. But where now is famous Heracles?

Heracles

What were you when you were underground?

1415

Theseus

In courage I was the least of men.

Heracles

Then will you say my grief degrades me now?

Theseus

Forward!

Heracles

Farewell, father!

Amphitryon

Farewell, my son.

Heracles

Bury my children.

Amphitryon

Who will bury me?

Heracles

I.

1420

Amphitryon

When will you come?

Heracles

When you bury them.

Amphitryon

How?

Heracles

I shall have them brought from Thebes to Athens.
 Take my children out, take them to their graves,
 while I, whose whole house has gone down in grief,
 am towed in Theseus' wake like some little boat.

The man who would prefer great wealth or strength 1425
 more than love, more than friends, is diseased of soul.

Chorus

We go in grief, we go in tears,
 who lose in you our greatest friend.

(*Theseus and Heracles leave by the left. The chorus goes to the right, while Amphitryon slowly follows the eccyclema with the bodies of Megara and the children inside the palace. The great doors close behind them.*)

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Translated by

WITTER BYNNER

Introduction by

RICHMOND LATTIMORE

INTRODUCTION TO IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

The Date

There is no external evidence for the date of *Iphigenia in Tauris* (it should be *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, but the other title has become regular through use); it has, however, been generally placed between 414 and 410 B.C., and there are good reasons for this. Meter is an excellent guide in dating the plays of Euripides, and metrically this play is similar to *The Trojan Women* (415), *Electra* (413), and *Helen* (412). In structure and plot *Iphigenia* is a romance or romantic comedy, and Euripides at this time seems to have been much interested in the possibilities of this type of play. The plots of *Iphigenia* and *Helen* are in many ways almost identical. In both, a woman who has been miraculously transported to the barbaric ends of the earth (Scythia, Egypt) and there held in honorable captivity is convinced, on the slightest kind of evidence, that the man in the world she loves most (brother, husband), her sole possible deliverer, is dead. Almost immediately she meets this very man and, after some misunderstanding, rushes into his arms in a joyful recognition scene. She then, with female guile (women, to Euripides, are more strategic than men) contrives their escape by working on the simple piety of the barbarian king, whose vengefulness is dispelled by the appearance of divinities (Athene, the Heavenly Twins), and all end at peace in the prospect of a happy future. This similarity might, however, be less striking if we possessed the lost plays of Euripides, since it is clear that he wrote many romantic comedies. *Ion* (possibly 411 B.C.) shares some of these features (supposed death and miraculous transportation, catastrophe barely averted, climax in recognition, happy ending) but is an example of the purer foundling-story. Our tenta-

tive date also goes well with the fact that at the end of his career Euripides was much interested in exploring the ramifications of the saga of the House of Atreus (*Electra*, 413; *Helen*, 412; *Orestes*, about 408; *Iphigenia at Aulis*, posthumous), though the plays do not connect with each other and often conflict in choice of legendary variants.

Iphigenia was probably not produced with *Electra* in 413, since Orestes appears in both plays but with rather different characteristics, and since the predictions at the end of *Electra* ignore the expedition to the Taurians; nor, probably, was it produced with *Helen* in 412, since the dramas are too much alike to have been given together. We must then choose between 414 and 411 (the style is not “late” enough for any posterior date); my own uncertain choice is 414.

The Play

Iphigenia in Tauris was of course presented as a tragedy, but it is not “tragical” like *Medea* or *Hippolytus*. The formulae by which we are accustomed to interpret tragedy—the tragic fault or tragic choice (*hamartia*), the punishment of *hybris* (whatever that means), the irreconcilable conflict of characters, or justified revenge breeding new hatred and wrong—do not apply here and can be blissfully ignored. Euripides is more interested in How than in Why, and even as romantic comedy *Iphigenia* is less seriously problematical, cuts less deep, than *Alcestis* or *Ion*. Note how briskly the murder of Clytemnestra is disposed of, lines 924–27.

But the cheerfulness is serious, and in it I find two dominant ideals. One is the love of Greece. Euripides has been sobered by the horrors of internecine war, and has dropped the narrow, often bellicose pro-Athenian theme, which appears in *Heracleidae* and *Andromache* and *The Suppliants*, in favor of a wider Hellenism. His homesick Greeks find no comfort in even the friendliness of outlanders and long for Greece, all Greece or any of Greece, not merely Athens. The other ideal is friendship, the devoted, disinterested friendship of Admetus, Heracles, and Apollo in *Alcestis*, of Heracles and

Theseus in *Heracles*, of Orestes, Pylades, and Electra in *Orestes* (a trio of cutthroats, to be sure, but their love seems to be real), and of the three friends here. Friendship and the love of Greek for Greek may indeed be symbolized for Euripides during this period in those Dorian twins, Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux) who appear at the end of *Helen* and *Electra*. Polydeuces refused to survive his brother. The twins have no place in this story; yet Euripides goes out of his way to bring them in (l. 272), since they are the prototypes and patrons of those who put all selfishness aside and make the fortunes of their friends their own.

The Translation

The editors asked the distinguished poet Witter Bynner for permission to use his translation originally made in 1915. This translation seemed to them to be in many ways the first modern translation. The present text represents Mr. Bynner's carefully polished revision of a manuscript created under circumstances best recounted by him:

It might be wondered, when what little Greek I had learned at college was forgotten, why and how I came to venture a version in English of a Euripidean play.

In 1914, Isadora Duncan with her six dancers had for some time been bringing Greek figures and friezes to life on the stages of several nations. Almost everyone connected in those days with any of the arts knew Isadora; and when she had been given use of the New Theater near Columbus Circle in New York, later called the Century Theater, we often heard her wish for a "night translation" of a Greek play to produce there. She had removed orchestra seats to make a deep-aproned stage on which she offered almost daily, at public performances, her rehearsals and experiments in dance and drama. Charging dearly for what lower seats were left but only ten cents for a gallery seat, she attracted substantial and ardent audiences to an exciting laboratory unique in American history. After her production of *Oedipus Rex*—the lead well played by her brother, Augustin—she kept begging me to try my hand at a version of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which, she said from some knowledge or other, "though superbly simple in the original, had never been humanly translated into Eng-

E U R I P I D E S

lish, but always with stilted inversions and scholarly heaviness, and the sense subjected to the sound."

She made me try it, the choruses first. Scenes of the play were to follow and be combined into growing length for performance, as fast as I could write them. We had put on the stage all of the choruses, for Margherita Duncan and Helen Freeman, besides the six girls and herself, before someone discovered and reported that by living in the theater's large, luxurious dressing-rooms Isadora and her group were breaking New York's fire regulations. So the whole experiment ended. But I finished the play, which was published as a single volume in 1915 and again, as part of my *Book of Plays*, in 1922. Both times, forgetting that we had omitted certain sections of the choruses which Isadora had thought too remotely allusive to be understood or effective, I neglected to restore them for print. They are included, however, in the present volume. I must add that in making the text for Isadora I relied only on close study of all English versions available. In revising it through the past two years, I have kept the choruses more or less as they were, a sort of musical accompaniment to the drama, but have otherwise written and discarded some seven manuscripts, with the devoted intent that what I could do for it might become ever simpler, clearer, and worthier of the humanist who wrote it.

For general accuracy, this new version has had the supervision of Richmond Lattimore, who instigated my endeavor to make it a still more human play in 1955 than the earlier version seemed to be in 1915. I repeat at this time the original dedication to my friend Barry Faulkner, the then young painter who helpfully watched the growth of the first version forty years ago.

C H A R A C T E R S

Iphigenia

Pylades

Orestes

Temple Maidens

The Herdsman

Soldiers

King Thoas

Athena

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

SCENE: *Out of a temple by the seaside in Tauris, down steps leading to a blood-stained altar seen through its door, comes Iphigenia, the High Priestess, and stands alone on the stairway above the empty court.*

Iphigenia

Pelops, the son of Tantalus, by maiming
A chariot, won a bride, who bore him Atreus,
And Atreus had two sons, one Menelaus,
The other Agamemnon, who in turn
By Clytemnestra had a child, and I
Am she, Iphigenia.

5

People believe
That I was sacrificed by my own father
To Artemis, in the great pursuit of Helen,
Upon an altar near the bay of Aulis,
There where the long deep waves are caught and broken
Hither and thither by the winds, the bay
Where Agamemnon's fleet, his thousand ships
From Hellas, waited to avenge on Troy
The wrong done Menelaus through the loss
Of Helen. But a storm came up and still
Another storm and neither sea nor wind
Would favor Agamemnon. So he asked
Calchas, the soothsayer, to consult the flame.
And this is what was answered: "Agamemnon,
Captain of Hellas, there can be no way
Of setting your ships free, till the offering
You promised Artemis is given Her.

10

15

You had vowed to render Her in sacrifice
 The loveliest thing each year should bear. You have owed
 Long since the loveliness which Clytemnestra
 Had borne to you, your daughter, Iphigenia.
 Summon your daughter now and keep your word."

20

They sent Odysseus and his artful tongue
 To lure me from my mother by pretending
 That I should wed Achilles. When I had come
 To Aulis, they laid hands on me. The flame
 Was lit. The blow would have been struck—I saw
 The knife. But Artemis deceived their eyes
 With a deer to bleed for me and stole me through
 The azure sky. And then She set me down
 Here in this town of Tauris, this abode
 Of savage men ruled by their uncouth king,
 Thoas, a horseman headlong as the wind,
 Who stationed me High Priestess in Her temple,
 And still I serve Her on Her festal days.

25

Service may seem a holy word. But far
 From holy are these orders I am bound
 To obey, never to question: Her command that I
 Must serve to Her the lives of foreigners.
 It was a custom long before I came,
 An ancient cruel custom. Can She hear me?
 My hands prepare the victims. Other hands,
 There in the inner temple, spill the blood,
 Which then is poured upon this altar-stone.

30

35

40

(She descends the steps into the court.)

I dreamed last night a deathly dream. Perhaps
 The morning will dispel it if I speak it—
 I dreamed that I was far beyond the seas.
 I seemed to be at home again in Argos,
 Asleep among my maidens—when a roll
 Of thunder shook the ground. I ran outside.
 I watched the house. I saw the coping fall,
 The cross-beams stir and yield, break and give way,
 Then the whole palace plunge from roof to base,

45

Only one column left upright in all
My father's house. But that one stood alive,
A man with bright brown hair and breathing lips.
And then against my will my hand went out,
As it does toward strangers here condemned to die,
And touched his forehead with this fatal water—
And with water of my tears, because I knew
The dream was of Orestes and his end. 50
The pillar of a family is the son.
This water is the certain sign of death.
It could not mean my family next of kin;
Strophius, my uncle, never had a son.
It was my brother whom I touched with tears—
For whom I now must pour a funeral-urn,
All I can do for one so far away. 55

(Climbing the steps.)

Where are the women from Greece the King appointed
To live with me and help me here in the temple?
I wonder where they are. I need their help. 60

The voice of Orestes

Keep a sharp lookout. Somebody may be coming.

Pylades

(Entering by the path from the bay.)

I have looked in both directions and there's no one.

Orestes

(Following him and gazing at the temple.)

Is this the shrine of Artemis we have sailed
So many seas to find since we left Argos?
Is it, O Pylades? Is this the shrine? 70

Pylades

I think it is, Orestes. So do you.

Orestes

And might that stone be stained with blood of Greeks?

Pylades

If ever I saw blood—look, on the edge!

Orestes

Look, near the roof! Belongings of the dead!

Pylades

Trophies of foreigners these men have murdered!

75

Orestes

Careful!

O Phoebus, why must Thy oracle
 Bring this on me again, the sight of blood
 Again? Have I not seen enough of blood?
 My mother shed my father's blood, I hers.
 And then the Furies, with their eyes bloody,
 Hunted me, hounded me across the land
 Until at last I ran to Thee and begged
 An end of all the cycles of despair
 That sped me, hurled me, maddened me through Hellas.

80

The answer was, "Go to the Taurian country
 Where Artemis, my sister, has a shrine.

85

Find there Her statue which had fallen down
 From Heaven. Then prove yourself a man able
 Enough or fortunate enough to steal it,
 Stalwart enough to face all risk and bring it
 Home to the holy land of Attica."

90

Although no more was said, I understood
 That this would mean the end of my afflictions.
 And here I am, O Phoebus, far from home
 On a misbegotten shore—doing Thy will.

But Pylades, my fellow venturer,
 Where can we turn? What man could possibly
 Scale these high walls? Or climb the open stairs
 And not be seen? Or force the brazen locks

95

Without whoever is behind them hearing?
 If we are caught, it will be certain death,
 Your death as well as mine. Even this waiting,
 Wondering what to do, may cost our lives.
 Enough of it! Enough! Back to the ship!

100

Pylades

What do we know of flight? How should we dare
 To take a course of which our hearts know nothing?
 Why should we disobey Apollo's order,
 Do him dishonor? No, we shall find a way.
 Come, let us leave the temple, let us look
 For a dark cave to hide in. Not the ship!
 By now they must have spied the ship from shore.
 They'd be ahead of us, catch us and end us.

105

Notice the opening between those beams?
 It's wide enough. Under the night's dim eye
 We could drop through and hoist a wooden statue.
 A coward turns away but a brave man's choice
 Is danger. And by all the Gods, shall we,
 Coming this far, now at the end turn back?

110

115

Orestes

I should have been the one to say those words.
 Yes, let us go and find a hiding-place,
 Keep faith with Phoebus and deserve his help.
 Have we not youth? Youth, with its fill of strength,
 Turning away from any task should be ashamed.

120

*(They leave by the path to the shore. A great bell
 rings. From the town side the Temple
 Maidens assemble in the courtyard.)*

A Maiden

Let those who dwell close to these Clashing Rocks
 That guard the Euxine Sea,
 Keep silence now before Latona's daughter,
 Artemis, Goddess of the pointed hills!

125

(*Turning toward the temple as the bell ceases.*)

O Artemis, I come
On consecrated feet into Thy court,
I hail Thee beautiful
As the golden gleaming of Thy colonnades!

130

A Second Maiden

Thy priestess calls us, she who keeps Thy keys,
Who left behind, for Thee,
Her land of Hellas, the embattled towers,
The shore of horses, and the quiet fields
Wherein our fathers lived.
And we obey her call to worship Thee
In this embittered land,
Far from Eurotas and from happiness.

135

(*Iphigenia enters from the temple, carrying a heavy golden urn.*)

A Third Maiden

(*Crossing to Iphigenia and taking it to hold for her.*)

O daughter of the king who gathered ships
A thousand strong and led
Unnumbered men against high-towering Troy,
We heard your call and we have come to you.
Why have you summoned us?
What makes your cheek so thoughtful and so pale?
What has your tongue to tell,
That your brow is dark and bowed upon your hands?

140

Iphigenia

My maidens, listen. Listen while I tell
What I have seen. The Muse has veiled Her face,
And I am mourning for a dead kinsman.
Last night in a dream I saw my family's ending,
So grieve for me. I saw my brother dead.

145

150

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

The dream was clear. My father's house is fallen,
My race broken and gone, Orestes dead!
So grieve for all of us, for all his people.
Fate, in still scourging me, takes from all Argos
My only brother!

155

To the vanished dead
I shall now pour an offering, a gift
Upon the earth, commingled of the milk
Of mountain-kine and of the wine of Bacchus
And of the honey that the russet bees
Gathered, a soothing gift. This and my heart.

160

165

(*To the Third Maiden.*)

Give me the urn of gold which heavy holds
My tribute to the God of Death.

This urn,

Orestes, son of Agamemnon, you
Who are lying under the dark earth, I lift
And pour—for you. And may the sweetness reach
And ease your lips. Better I cannot give,
I cannot bring to you braids of my hair
And, crying, lay them down upon your grave.
Yet, though from childhood you have thought me dead,
I still can cry—far from my home and you.

170

175

A Fourth Maiden

O Lady, woe is in me for your woe,
My words are like a song
Of old which mourners in the far-off East
Chant for the dead, reciting only death,
A requiem of hell,
A wail of no returning and no hope,
Using no note of glory,
Only the desolation of the grave.

180

185

The First Maiden

Mourn for the sons of Atreus, in whose house
The hearth can never burn.

Mourn for their bitter heritage, a home
 Which waits the coming of a happy king
 But cannot give him welcome.
 Trouble was born forever in their sky
 When Pelops tricked a car
 Of toppling horses out of the race for a bride.

190

The Third Maiden

Because of a golden lamb which long ago
 Beckoned contesting men,
 Mischief began to undermine your house.

195

The Fourth Maiden

Vengeance has made its unappeasèd way
 With every dart of death
 And visited your family one by one.
 And now with eager hand
 Fate is pursuing you. Your turn has come.

200

Iphigenia

Oh bitter my beginning in the womb
 Of her who bore me, from the very night
 When she conceived! Appointed by the Fates
 To suffer in this world, I was a child
 Accursed. Yet how she cherished me, her first-born,
 And thrilled that I, of all the girls of Argos,
 Should be a bride upon the way to Troy!

205

What had she borne me for and loved me for?—
 To be destroyed by my own father's hand,
 To come, behind the horses of delight,
 Not to Achilles—but to grief and horror!

210

And now beside this melancholy sea
 I live my days—lonely, no love, no friends,
 Wife of no man and mother of no child.
 I know no home. I sing no Argive song
 With Argive women to the Queen of Heaven.
 I weave upon the whirring loom no tale
 Of Pallas routing Titans. . . . Oh, instead,

215

220

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

I face an altar soaked with bloody death. 225
I hear the cry for pity and the moans
Of men—a thing too hideous to be told.
 Yet even that seems little to me now—
Now that a throne is empty and his eyes 230
Are done with weeping, as I wish mine were.
I who have loved him through these lonely years
Shall never see him now but as I left him,
A little baby at his mother's breast—
I who had 'thought to see him as a king. 235

The Second Maiden

(*Pointing.*)

That herdsman running, stumbling, from the beach!

What can have happened there?

(*They watch the sea-path.*)

A Herdsman

(*Entering out of breath.*)

O daughter of the house of Agamemnon,
I bring you news!

Iphigenia

Urgent enough for this

Rough outcry in the temple-yard? 240

The Herdsman

A ship

From sea has passed through the Symplegades!
And through the fog two fellows waded ashore,
And never was a finer offering
Than these two boys will be for Artemis!
I have been sent to tell you to make ready. 245

Iphigenia

Where are they from?—what country? Could you say?

The Herdsman

From Hellas, but I couldn't say which part.

Iphigenia

What were their names? Perhaps you heard their names?

The Herdsman

One of them called the other Pylades.

Iphigenia

And the one who spoke?

The Herdsman

I didn't hear his name.

250

Iphigenia

Where were they captured?

The Herdsman

Right there on the shore.

Iphigenia

What were you herdsmen doing on the shore?

The Herdsman

Washing our cattle there.

Iphigenia

Tell me again.

255

How were they captured? This is the first time
In all the years I have been living here
That any of you ever brought a Greek
To be the offering. Never a Greek.*The Herdsman*Just as we drove our cattle from the woods
To that long hollow where the curving tide
Has cut away the cliff, where the beach-men rest
From purple-fishing, one of us ahead

260

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Came stealing back on tiptoe and he warned us, 265
 "Those are not men but Gods! Behind that rock!
 Not men but Gods!" And then another herdsman
 Caught sight of them, raised up his hands and prayed, 270
 "Palaemon, born of a Sea-Goddess, Master of Ships,
 Protect us, whether these boys be the Twins
 Of Battle, sons and favorites of Zeus,
 Or else be brothers of the Ocean Nymphs,
 Be sons of Nereus, God of Waves like Thee!"
 But another jeered at us and laughed out loud, 275
 So that I thought the Gods would turn on him.
 But he was sure there must have been a wreck,
 And these were sailors looking for our cave
 To hide in, having heard that strangers here
 Are sacrificed. And he persuaded most 280
 Of us, and we were thinking what to do,
 When one of them ran out around the rock.
 Just staring, not at us or anything
 That we could see, but at the air and shook
 And groaned, ducking his head from side to side
 Behind his arms as if he'd gone insane.
 And he was calling out, sharp as a hunter,
 "Look, Pylades! O look at her! O look! 285
 There! There! Surely you see her now!—that Fiend
 From Hell! And on her head look at the snakes,
 Their mouths wide open, writhing for my blood!
 Here comes another one! And look at that one
 Up on the cliff, vomiting fire on me,
 Lifting my mother's body like a rock
 So she can smash it down on me and kill me! 290
 Pylades, help me! They are all around me!"
 And we could tell, by the way he jerked his head
 Whenever a dog barked or a cow mooed,
 That if a Fury wasn't chasing him
 He thought there was in every sound he heard.
 He might have knocked us flat there in a row, 295
 We were so stunned. Instead, drawing his sword,
 He lunged into our cattle like a lion,

As if they were the Furies, ripped their sides
 With all his might till blood was running down,
 Staining the edge. We were just untrained herdsmen
 Facing expert young swordsmen; but we saw
 The cattle wounded and dying and we hunted
 For sticks and stones and blew our shells for help
 And pretty soon farmers enough had joined us
 To fight. Then, as we slowly started forward,
 His madness left him. I can see him now—
 Standing a moment. While I watch he drops
 In a heap and foaming at the lips. Once more
 We started toward him with our sticks and stones,
 But still, his comrade, unafraid of us,
 Leaned down to wipe the frothy mouth and laid
 A piece of linen over the face to shield it—
 Till suddenly the fallen man stood up,
 Calm and himself again, and faced the rush
 Of rocks we heaved at him like breaking waves.
 We crowded in on him from every side.
 He gave one groan as we surrounded him,
 Ready to capture him or finish him.
 And then we heard his voice ring out and say,
 “If this is death, let’s meet it, Pylades,
 Like men! Come on! Together! With our swords!”

The metal flashed at us. We backed and tricked them
 Into the hollow. There, while some of us
 Would run for cover, others could throw rocks
 To draw the swordsmen off and then give way
 And let the first lot rally with new armfuls.
 And yet we couldn’t seem to hit those fellows.
 I don’t see how it was, with all the stones
 We threw at them, that hardly one went straight.
 All we could manage was to wear them down
 By working round each man, aiming our volleys
 Just at his sword, which, once he lost his grip,
 He was too winded to pick up again.

And when we took our prisoners to the king,
 He told us we should bring them here, and you

300

305

310

315

320

325

330

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Should get them ready for the sacrifice. 335
 Ask Artemis to send us more of them,
 More sailor-boys from Greece, send them to Tauris,
 And let more men from Hellas pay with blood
 After their shouting for your blood at Aulis.

The First Maiden

This is no ordinary man who has come 340
 From shores of Hellas to an alien shore
 And battles like a God.

Iphigenia

Go back and bring me the two foreigners.
 I shall be waiting for them when you come.

(*The Herdsman leaves.*)

Poor heart of mine, which always hitherto
 Has been compassionate, tender toward strangers, 345
 And even yesterday felt a quick pang
 At thought of Greeks who might be lost in Tauris,
 A crushing dream has changed you overnight.
 For since Orestes is no more alive,
 Now, where my heart was, there is only stone. 350
 Strangers who come today, no matter who,
 Will find in me a woman beyond tears.

Unhappiness, O friends, can harden us
 Toward other sorrow harsher than our own.

If but some heaven-sent wind, forcing a ship
 Between the Clashing Rocks, might bring me Helen, 355
 The Helen whom I hate, and Menelaus,
 That I might make of them the sacrifice,
 Let a new Aulis expiate the old,
 And vent my vengeance! It was Helen's fault
 And his, that Greek hands lifted me at Aulis
 And led me like a beast where, at the altar,
 My father held the sacrificial knife. 360
 I live it all again. My fingers, groping,
 Go out to him like this and clutch his beard

And cling about his knees. I cry to him:
 "It is you yourself, yourself, who brought me here,
 You who deceived my maidens and my mother! 365
 They sing my marriage-song at home, they fill
 The house with happiness, while all the time
 Here am I dying at my father's hands!
 You led me in your chariot to take
 Achilles for my lord, but here is death
 And the taste of blood, not kisses, on my lips!" 370

And I had left my home with my white veil
 Drawn down. I had not taken in my arms
 My brother—dead this day—nor kissed my sister.
 I had saved all my kisses and embraces 375
 For the man I was to marry. Even then
 My heart was homesick and was faint with hope
 That I should soon be back again in Argos.

And now, O dead Orestes, you, as I,
 Forfeit your heritage and lose your home.

And what does Artemis ask of me here?— 380
 She who forbids approach by any man
 Whose hand is stained with bloodshed or with touch
 Of childbirth or of burial, finds him
 Unclean and bans him. She so delicate
 In all these ways will yet demand the blood
 Of human beings on Her altar-stone!
 It cannot be. How could Latona bear 385
 To Zeus so cruel a daughter? It is not true.
 It is as false as tales of Tantalus
 Feeding the Gods a child. O Artemis,
 These people, being murderers themselves,
 Are charging Thee with their own wickedness. 390
 No! I will not believe it of a God!

The Second Maiden

O Clashing Rocks, under whose shadow the dark
 Threat waits, though through this cleft
 Io fled safe, in her disguise as heifer
 Pursued by the sharp stinging of the gadfly, 395

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S

Fled beyond Europe's land
And Europe's sea, fled safe but sick at heart,
 Away from home and kin,
Into the alien wilderness of Asia,
What sort of men would leave the holy streams
 Of Dirce, or the reeds
Green-growing in Eurotas, to explore
A bitter beach, to dare these ominous rocks
 Where the seas meet in fog,
Where Artemis, among Her colonnades
 Demanding sacrifice,
Receives upon her altar human blood?

400

405

The Fourth Maiden

Why have they urged the oarsmen of their ship
 To shake the clinging sea
With a great stroke and to accelerate
With rush of rivalry the racing wind?
 Was it to sweep the shores
For riches and to vie in bearing home,
 Each to upbuild his house,
The treasures and the trophies of the world?
That glittering hope is immemorial
 And beckons many men
To their undoing. Ever insatiate
They sail the sea and look to foreign towns
 To fill their ships with spoil.
But some men never find prosperity,
 For all their voyaging,
While others find it with no voyaging.

410

415

420

The Third Maiden

How have they passed the peril of the Rocks
 That Clash and of the coast
Of Phineus heavy with broken waves?
I wonder if they sailed across that reach
 Of sea where mariners
Boast to have looked on Ocean's Fifty Daughters

425

E U R I P I D E S

Under the windowed waves,
Hand in hand dancing, circling round and singing.

430

The Fourth Maiden

I wonder if their rudder steered them through
That other reach of sea
Where the south wind eases and the southwest wind
Delights a sail and where the isles are white
With birds that cover them,
That rise and wheel and then curve back again,
Where the wings of ocean brood
And where Achilles races the dark waters.

435

The First Maiden

My Lady prayed that Fate might hither bring,
On the way home from Troy,
The cause of her great misery. Oh, would
That Helen, Helen had been blown ashore,
That on her fatal head
For punishment the holy drops might fall
And that my Lady's knife
Might find in her the fitting sacrifice!

440

445

The Second Maiden

But I have prayed for a deliverer,
Some mariner from Hellas
Able to end my grief and set me free.
Ever I go, though only in a dream,
Back to my father's house.
And few have greater riches than the joy
That comes to us in visions,
In dreams which nobody can take away.

450

455

The Third Maiden

Look, there they are! See the two men in chains!
The herdsman told the truth.
We must be quiet now for Artemis.

The Second Maiden

Can hands even from Hellas be so useless
Against this ritual!

460

The Fourth Maiden

O Artemis, if Tauris in Thy sight
Win honor by such gift
As never Greece would take, receive this blood!

465

Iphigenia

Once more I must believe that Artemis
Desires this worship, once again I serve Her.

(*To some of the Soldiers, who bring in the
two youths.*)

Loosen their hands. For in the temple court,
As in the temple during consecration,
Chains are unhallowed things.

(*To the Temple Maidens, who obey.*)

Enter the temple.

470

Prepare the altar for the sacrifice.

(*Turning to the captives, with Soldiers still by them.*)

I wonder who your mother was, your father,
Whether you have a sister who must lose
Her brothers and lament their bravery.
Fate comes and goes, invisible and mute,
And never whispers where Her blow shall fall.
None of us ever sees Her in the dark
Or understands Her cruel mysteries.
Tell me, unfortunate men, where are you from—
You who are far from home and yet must go
Farther away from home even than this?

475

480

Orestes

But who are you, feeling concern for us?
What could we mean to you that you should care

And make it harder for us with your pity?
 What good can come from meeting death with tears?
 Only a fool, finding that he must meet it, 485
 Wishes to talk about it. If a man
 Is sorry for himself, he doubles death:
 Is first a coward, then a coward's corpse.
 So let a man accept his destiny,
 No pity and no tears. The sacrifice
 Is customary here. We knew it was. 490

Iphigenia

One of your names was told me by a herdsman.
 May I know which of you is Pylades?

Orestes

He, if it does you any good to know.

Iphigenia

And from what town in Hellas? 495

Orestes

Does it matter?

Iphigenia

Brothers?

Orestes

We are—in everything but birth.

Iphigenia

What is your name?

Orestes

Call me unfortunate. 500

Iphigenia

That would be pity's name for you.

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S

Orestes

Then say

That I am nobody—safe from derision.

Iphigenia

Your name is too important to be told?

Orestes

Come, sacrifice my body, not my name!

Iphigenia

You will not name for me even your town?

505

Orestes

I am so soon a townsman of no town.

Iphigenia

Surely it is not much to tell me that.

Orestes

It is when one can say a town in Argos!

Iphigenia

Argos? Not Argos? You are not from Argos?

Orestes

My town, Mycena, was a lordly place.

510

Iphigenia

Then what could make you leave it? Were you banished?

Orestes

In a way banished—banished by myself.

Iphigenia

How good it is to see a man from Argos!

515

Orestes

But not to be one in your company!

Iphigenia

And let me ask about another town.

Orestes

But why this questioning?

Iphigenia

What is the news
Of that most talked-of town in the whole world?
What is the news of Troy?

Orestes

By all the Gods,
I wish that I had never heard its name!

Iphigenia

But is it true that Troy is overthrown?

Orestes

Its towers lie broken in the dust.

520

Iphigenia

And Helen?
Has Menelaus taken Helen back?

Orestes

Yes, to the sorrow of a noble man.

Iphigenia

She has brought me sorrow too. Where is she now?

Orestes

Gone back with him to Sparta.

Iphigenia

How I hate
The name of Helen! How all Hellas hates it!

525

Orestes

I have my own reason for hating it.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Iphigenia

The Achaeans are safely home, as I have heard?

Orestes

Some of them are. It would take long to tell.

Iphigenia

But tell me all you can while there is time!

Orestes

Then ask me all you can and I will answer.

530

Iphigenia

The soothsayer, Calchas? Is he back from Troy?

Orestes

Mycenae people say that he is dead.

Iphigenia

Praise Artemis! And is Odysseus dead?

Orestes

Not back nor dead, they say. Still wandering.

Iphigenia

Oh how I hope he never reaches home!

535

Orestes

Why wish him worse than he has borne already?

Iphigenia

What of Achilles?

Orestes

Dead. The marriage planned
At Aulis never happened.

Iphigenia

Those who know
Know well that it was never meant to happen.

Orestes

Knowing so much, are you yourself from Hellas?

540

Iphigenia

I lived in Hellas, many years ago.

Orestes

No wonder you are asking all these questions.

Iphigenia

What of that king they called The Happy King?

Orestes

I know no happy king. Whom do you mean?

Iphigenia

King Agamemnon.

Orestes

What can I say of him?

Nothing at all of him. No, do not ask me.

545

Iphigenia

I beg you by the Gods do me that grace.

Orestes

The news is death—his and another death.

Iphigenia

O Agamemnon! O King Agamemnon!

Orestes

Can you be kin to him, you care so much?

550

Iphigenia

Remembering his love of life, his pride!

Orestes

All of it ended by a woman's hand.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Iphigenia

O miserable woman! Poor, poor king!

Orestes

I pray, I beg you, ask me no more questions.

Iphigenia

Only about his queen. Is she alive?

555

Orestes (doggedly)

His queen is dead. Her own son killed her.

Iphigenia

Why?

Orestes

To punish her for murdering his father.

Iphigenia

It was exact of him. I pity him.

Orestes

As well you may, since no God pities him.

560

Iphigenia

Of Agamemnon's children, who is left?

Orestes

Electra—but her husband far from her.

Iphigenia

The one they sacrificed—what do they say?

Orestes

Nothing of her, except that she is dead.

Iphigenia

And he could kill his child—that “happy king!”

565

Orestes

It was a wicked war for a wicked woman,
And all the waste that has come from it is wicked.

Iphigenia

The son of the king? He too is dead in Argos!

Orestes

Not dead but not in Argos, not in Argos.

(*The Temple Maidens return to the court.*)

Iphigenia (telling them)

I dreamt Orestes dead! It was a lie!

Orestes

Dreams, lies, dreams—nothing but emptiness!
Even the Gods, with all Their name for wisdom,
Have only dreams and lies and lose Their course,
Blinded, confused, and ignorant as we.
The wisest men follow their own direction
And listen to no prophet guiding them.
None but the fools believe in oracles,
Forsaking their own judgment. Those who know,
Know that such men can only come to grief.

570

575

The Second Maiden

Oh who will bring us news whether our kin
Are living or are dead?

Iphigenia

(*To Orestes.*)

For years I have had a plan which now might serve
As much to your advantage as to mine.
Joint undertakings stand a better chance
When they benefit both sides. So tell me this.
Would you, if I could win you leave to do so,
Go back to Argos, with a letter from me

580

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Long ready for a friend of mine who lives there?
 My words were written down by one who died
 A victim here and yet was sorry for me, 585
 Blaming his death on Artemis, not me.
 No one had come from Hellas till you came,
 No Greek who might be spared and take my letter.
 But you are gentle, you are the very man
 To carry it. You know the names of places
 And of persons dear to me. And so I ask
 Your help and in return could grant your life,
 With one condition—that your friend shall pay 590
 The price the state exacts for Artemis.
 595

Orestes

Strange lady, you have made a fair proposal
 Save in that one respect. What would my life
 Be worth to me, gained by forsaking a friend?
 I am the captain of this misadventure
 And he the loyal shipmate who stayed by me. 600
 A sorry ending if he paid the cost
 And I rejected my own enterprise!
 Your errand shall be done—but not by me.
 Give him your confidence, give him your letter.
 To you it makes no difference which of us
 Carries your message home. To me it would make
 No difference when or how my life should finish
 If through continuing it, saving it, 605
 I brought disaster on a friend and knew
 No honor left in me, no faith, no love.
 Besides, this man is dear to me, his life
 Is even closer to me than my own.

Iphigenia

Your heart is made of gold. You must have come
 From some great seed, to be so true a friend.
 If only the last member of my line 610
 Be such as you! I have a brother living,
 Though face to face with him, I should not know him.

As you have chosen then, so let it be.
 Your friend shall take the letter, and you prove
 Your loyalty by giving him your life. 615

Orestes

Whose hand is it that brings the touch of death?

Iphigenia

My hand—condemned to it by Artemis.

Orestes

Your hand is still too young a hand for that.

Iphigenia

It is the law. 620

Orestes

That a woman shall stab men?

Iphigenia

Not that! Oh not the knife! Only the water,
 The marking on the forehead—only the water!

Orestes

Whose hand then does the deed, uses the knife?

Iphigenia

Inside the temple—there are men for it.

Orestes

When I am burnt, what happens to my body? 625

Iphigenia

They seal the ashes in a rocky gorge.

Orestes

I wish my sister's hand might tend my body.

Iphigenia

Since she is far away and cannot hear you

Or be with you to give these services,
 I shall attend to them. I am from Argos. 630
 I will do everything that she might do,
 Will bring rich robes to be your final clothing
 And funeral ornaments to set about you
 And yellow oil to pour, cooling and clean,
 Upon the embers. I will melt your ashes
 In gold that bees collect from mountain-flowers. 635
 You shall be pure and sweet.

While I am gone
 To find my letter, do not think ill of me.

(*To the soldiers.*)

Keep careful guard without binding these men.

(*To herself, pausing as she leaves the court.*)

Oh, if at last my letter should arrive
 In Argos and be opened by his own
 Beloved hand, a letter never dreamed of, 640
 Then he would listen through my opening grave
 And hear my living lips cry out to him.

(*She leaves, passing around the temple.*)

The First Maiden

O you whose head must feel this water's touch,
 My heart goes out to you! 645

Orestes

Have hope for him, instead of pitying me.

The First Maiden

My heart both pities you and hopes for him
 That he may safely reach
 His father's country and be happy there.

Pylades

Could I desert a friend and still be happy? 650

The First Maiden

Or I help pitying a man who dies?

The Fourth Maiden

The one who lives will be the one I pity.

The Third Maiden

Which is the sadder fate?

*The Fourth Maiden*I cannot tell. I watch and cannot tell
Whether to pity you, or you, the more.

655

Orestes

What is it, Pylades? What puzzles you?

Pylades

What do you think it is that puzzles me?

Orestes

That woman and the way she put her questions. 660

The sort of questions: the defeat of Troy,
The Achaeans' homecoming, what happened to Calchas,
To Achilles, and her being so concerned
At Agamemnon's death and then inquiring
About his wife and children. I believe
It true that she herself belongs in Argos 665
Or she would never send a letter there
And care about occurrences in Argos
As if they flowed within her very veins.*Pylades*Yes, that is what at first had puzzled me,
And then I thought it natural enough
That in a place even half civilized
People should care about the fate of kings.
But that was not what puzzled me, not that. 670

Orestes

If we put our heads together, we could surely—

Pylades

How can you wrong me, thinking I would live
And leave you here to die? I came with you.

675

I shall continue with you to the end,

Or I could never show my face again

On an Argive hill or in a Phocian valley

But to be pointed out and rightly spurned

As one who had betrayed a friend. People

Might say worse things than that, the worst

680

An evil mind could think of to enjoy:

That I had wished or even caused your death

To benefit, as husband of your sister,

By my inheritance—to win your throne.

Such thoughts are frightening, but worse my shame

In your imagining that I might leave you.

If you meet knife and flame, then so do I.

685

I am your friend and there's no more to say.

Orestes

How can you be my friend and yet refuse me?

The load I bear can never be laid down—

And would you add to it by lightening yours?

All the contempt you imagine from men's hearts

And tongues, falling on you, would fall on me

In my own heart from my own conduct, if I let

The service you have done me bring you harm.

What has Fate left me of my life to cherish

But a good ending? As for you, my comrade,

You have not any right to choose to die.

You have the blessing of your fortunate blood

To make you wish to live. I can but pray

That, by your living, solace may be brought

To my ill-fated family. Pylades,

Once home again and with your wife, my sister,

Give me my happiness by having a son

In whom my name shall live, and through your children

690

695

Build up once more the house of Agamemnon.
 Go back, I say, and make my home your home.
 You will be there in Hellas, on the shore
 Where Argive horsemen ride. Give me your hand 700
 And swear to me that you will build my tomb,
 Will set memorials in it and will ask
 My sister for a lock of her long hair
 To lay with them. Tell her that I was led
 Before this altar by a gentle hand,
 A woman's hand, a woman born in Argos, 705
 And how at last my blood was purified.
 O Pylades, be gentle to my sister!
 And so goodbye, my best and closest friend.
 When we were boys, we loved sharing our sports.
 You rode the hills with me. And now in manhood
 You are the one who has shared the heartache with me 710
 When treacherous Phoebus through his oracle
 First lied to me, then tricked me, luring me far
 From home, lest watchful eyes in Hellas see
 That Gods as well as men break promises.
 I trusted Him, with all my faith and will,
 Even, at His command, killing my mother,
 And in return He has forsaken me. 715

Pylades

I shall obey your will, though not my own;
 Shall build your tomb in Hellas. Your heart knows
 That I shall love your sister all my life.
 And, close to you in your life, my heart knows
 That it shall hold you closer in your death—
 If death it be. Gods, in mysterious ways, 720
 Never explaining, mask the face of life,
 Behind what looks death, disguising life,
 And then revealing it.

Orestes

The time is gone
 When Gods might show that face. For she has come.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Iphigenia

(*Returning to the temple by the town-path and addressing the Attendants who follow her.*)

Precede me into the temple and be ready.

725

(*The Attendants enter the temple.*)

Here is my letter, safe within these folds.
But I have wondered. A man who has been in danger
When he comes out of it forgets his fears,
And sometimes he forgets his promises. 730
Might it not happen that your friend, intent
Upon his own concerns again, forget
How very much this letter means to me?

Orestes

And what would you suggest, to ease your mind?

Iphigenia

His solemn vow to take this where I say.

735

Orestes

And will you make a vow balancing his?

Iphigenia

To do what, or undo what?

Orestes

To make sure

He be allowed to leave this deathly place.

Iphigenia

How could he keep his vow, unless he leave?

740

Orestes

What makes you think the king will let him sail?

Iphigenia

I can persuade the king and will myself
Go to the ship and see your friend aboard.

403

Orestes

Then word the vow as you would have him make it.

Iphigenia

You promise the delivery of my letter?

Pylades

I promise the delivery of your letter.

745

Iphigenia

I promise you the king will let you leave.

Pylades

In whose name do you swear?

Iphigenia

By Artemis,

Here in Her Temple—and implore Her help.

Pylades

And I by Zeus Himself, by Heaven's King.

Iphigenia

And what if you should fail to keep your word?

750

Pylades

Then may I never again set eyes on Argos.

And what if you should fail in keeping yours?

Iphigenia

Then may I never again set foot in Argos.

Pylades

But we forget one possibility.

Iphigenia

Which might affect the keeping of your vow?

Pylades

How could I keep my vow if this should happen—

If we were wrecked by a storm, torn by a reef,

755

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

If we were sunk and everything went down,
And if my life were saved but not the letter.
If that should happen, how could I keep my word?

Iphigenia

In any plan, two ways improve on one.
So I will tell you, slowly, line by line,
The contents of my letter, which, if need be,
You are to tell my friend. Then he will know.
For either you will place it in his hand
And the written words will speak to him or else,
If they are lost, your voice will be their echo.

760

765

Pylades

That is a surer way, for both of us.
So whom am I to find for you in Argos?
What shall I say to him?

Iphigenia

Say this to him.

Say to Orestes, son of Agamemnon,
"A greeting comes from one you think is dead."
Tell him, "Your sister is not dead at Aulis
But is alive."

770

Orestes

Alive? Iphigenia?
Oh, no! Unless the dead come back again!

Iphigenia

You are looking at her now, for I am she.
But let me finish what I ask of him.
"O brother, come and save me from a life
As priestess in a loathsome ritual—
Save me from dying in this lonely land."

775

Orestes

Where am I, Pylades? What am I hearing?

Iphigenia

"Lest memory of me should always haunt you."

The name, you must repeat it, is Orestes.

Orestes

I hear a God!

Iphigenia

You hear only a woman.

Orestes

I hear a woman—and I hear a God!

780

Let me hear more! I hear a miracle!

*Iphigenia*Then tell him, "Artemis put out Her hand
And spared my life at Aulis, leaving a deer
To bleed instead." And tell him this, "My father,
Not looking when he struck, believed me dead.
Artemis brought me here." The letter ends.

785

Pylades

No word was ever easier to keep!

Lady, keep yours or not, I keep mine now!

790

I give you this, Orestes, from your sister!

Orestes

How can I look at letters! Let me look—

Oh let me stare at you whom I had lost!

Oh let me touch you with my hands and prove

795

That you are real and hold you close, close!

The Third Maiden

Do not lay hands, whoever you may be,

Upon a vestment sacred

To Artemis! Do not profane that robe!

Orestes

You are my sister, you are my father's daughter,

800

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

And nature will not let you turn away
From your own brother given back to you.

Iphigenia

Ah, you would have me think that you are he.
Orestes is not here. He is in Argos.

Orestes

Poor sister, not in Argos! I am here!

805

Iphigenia

You mean Tyndareus was your mother's father?

Orestes

Yes, and my father's grandfather was Pelops.

Iphigenia

What are you saying? How can I believe you?

Orestes

By asking me more questions—about home.

Iphigenia

Say anything—say anything at all.

810

Orestes

Electra used to tell us about Atreus,
About Thyestes, how they came to quarrel.

Iphigenia

The fight they had over the golden lamb!

Orestes

The tapestry you made of it, yourself.

Iphigenia

Are you Orestes? Is it really you?

815

E U R I P I D E S

Orestes

Another tapestry you made, of Helios
Changing His course. Have you forgotten that?

Iphigenia

I can remember every single thread.

Orestes

And the bath perfumes, a present for your wedding,
Sent by your mother to Aulis—you remember?

Iphigenia

I live each bitter moment of that day.

Orestes

The lock of hair you sent back to your mother?

Iphigenia

I meant it for my own memorial
To mark a grave where I could never lie.

Orestes

The keepsake in your room! Do you remember
The ancient spear, the one Pelops had used
On Oenomaus, when he won from him
Hippodamia as a bride from Pisa?

Iphigenia

It is, it is! Orestes! O my brother!
My home has come to me from far away,
For you have come, I have you in my arms.

Orestes

And I have you in mine, whom I thought dead.
No wonder that our eyes are blind with tears,
Of joy, not sorrow—yet of sorrow too.

Iphigenia

You were a baby when I sailed away,

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Lifted to watch me, held up by your nurse
To wave goodbye. And now those little arms
I saw reach out have come to me, grown strong
To comfort me! How can I tell my joy?
There is no language sweet enough to tell it.
There is no joy like this. There never was.

835

Orestes

And there must never be an end of it.

Iphigenia

I am bewildered. And I cannot think
What I should say, my friends. I cannot think
Of anything but joy—except a fear
That he might vanish as he came. O Argos!
My heart is full of my beloved Argos,
Of everybody who belongs to Argos,
And of my brother born and bred in Argos
To be a living light honoring Argos!

845

Orestes

How could the happiness we both were born for
Become unhappiness?

850

Iphigenia

Unhappiness

Began for me when my unhappy father
Lifted a knife and drew it toward my throat.

Orestes

I was not there, and yet how plain I see you!

Iphigenia

And do you see what I remember there?
The treachery, the misery, the shame!
After the trickery, the vanishing
Of all my dreams! Not to Achilles' arms
I went, circled with songs, but, shaken with sobs,

855

I felt the hot flame from the altar-stone
And the cold water trickled on my head.

865

Orestes

O desolate daughter of a desolate father!
I see his face. I see his haunted face!

Iphigenia

But why feel pity for the pitiless man
Who caused all this?

865

Orestes

And might have caused today
Your leading your own brother to the grave.

Iphigenia

Some God prevented. But I came so near,
My hand so nearly set the final seal,
That I still shake as though you lay here dead.
We have seen the beginning of a miracle. 870
We found each other and my hand was spared
From signaling your death. How can we now
Fulfil the miracle, make it complete?
How can I save you from some other hand
And speed you safely homeward from this place? 875
There will be many hands, and many swords,
For you to face. How could you match them all?
A giant's task, too, much for any man!
There are no weapons possible but wits,
And yet I see you stand there dazed as I. 880
Could you outrun them when they follow you,
Escape them on an inland wooded trail?
Or would a dash through breakers be the way?
Would you be safer trusting to the trail
Or to the ship? Oh, I can see you losing 885
Your way on land, risking a thousand deaths.
The countryside is full of savage men.
The ship is better, even that sharp cleft

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Between the Clashing Rocks. Yes, risk the sea. 890
 You challenged it, came through it. Having once
 Met it and mastered it, you can again.
 And so let fly your oars. Yes, risk the sea,
 Take to the ship—though who can surely tell
 If God or man shall steer you through the waves 895
 To a safe landing, or if Fate shall grant
 Argos the benison of your return?
 Or me—who knows?—the sweet surprise of mine!

The Third Maiden

I have heard marvelous tales from story-tellers, 900
 But nothing to compare
 With this event which my own eyes have seen.

Pylades

Orestes, it was natural and right
 For you and for your sister to compare
 Old memories, but surely it's high time
 We think of nothing else but our escape 905
 From this grim place and how to manage it.
 No man, when Fortune beckons him, should wait
 A single instant. He should follow her.

Orestes

Meet her halfway, you mean, more than halfway, 910
 Since every God helps him who helps himself.

Iphigenia

But first—I cannot wait—I have to hear!
 Oh tell me just a word about my sister—
 About Electra! Tell me about Electra!

Orestes

This is the husband who has made her happy. 915

Iphigenia

This man? But who. . . .

E U R I P I D E S

Orestes

A Phocian. Strophius' son.

Iphigenia

Then he is Atreus' grandson! He's our kinsman!

Orestes

Your cousin—my one friend.

Iphigenia

Not even born

When I left home to die.

920

Orestes

He is the son

Of Strophius in old age.

Iphigenia

I welcome you,

My sister's husband.

Orestes

And my more than brother.

Iphigenia

But oh our mother? You have not said why—

Orestes

I said enough—I said she killed our father.

925

Iphigenia

You have not told me why.

Orestes

Then do not ask me.

Iphigenia

May I not ask if you are king of Argos?

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S

Orestes

Not king but exile. Menelaus is king.

Iphigenia

When you most needed him, he drove you out?

930

Orestes

Not he. The Furies—the avenging Fiends.

Iphigenia

Your madness on the beach—it was the Fiends?

Orestes

Anyone seeing me might think it madness.

Iphigenia

Still chasing you because you killed our mother?

Orestes

They try to choke me with my mother's blood!

935

Iphigenia

What brought you here?

Orestes

Phoebus—His oracle.

Iphigenia

Why should He choose this place?

Orestes

Oh let me tell

My bitter narrative from end to end.

After my hand had unforgivably
Punished my mother's unforgivable sin,
Down on my head they came, the Avenging Furies,
The nameless Fiends. Then Phoebus ordered me
To Athens that I might explain to Them

940

In the Tribunal Zeus had sanctified
To Ares when she answered ancient charges.

945

When I arrived there, none of all my friends
Received me. They avoided me at first
As one unclean. Later they pitied me
And gave me food in the same room with them
But at a separate table where they let
My meals be served when theirs were, sent me a cup
When their love-bowl was passed, but then would turn
Away and would not look at me nor speak
To me—because I was a murderer. . . .
I tried to act as though I did not care,
But sad and lonely when I thought of her
Whom I had killed, I drank a bitter cup.

950

955

I am told Athenians commemorate
My trial with a Service of the Pitcher,
Everyone drinking his own cup in silence. . . .

960

While I was facing judgment on that hill,
I on one flagging and across from me
The eldest of the Avengers charging me
With murder, Phoebus rose to my defense.
It was His eloquence that saved my life,
Persuading Pallas, in the chair, with votes
Cast evenly for and against me, that she add
Her own vote for me—which acquitted me.

965

Some of the Fiends, persuaded, went to found
A cellar temple under the Tribunal.
Others denounced the verdict as unfair
And flew at me in such a vicious frenzy
That I ran back for help again from Phoebus,
Faint with despair fell down upon my knees
And swore to starve myself to death unless
The God who had ruined me would rescue me.

970

975

Out pealed His voice over the golden tripod,
Bidding me find among the Taurians
Their Artemis of wood carven in Heaven
But fallen on their coast and, stealing it,
Establish it for Grecian worshippers

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

In Attica.

Help me to do this thing
 And to fulfil His mission. Help me, sister!
 Once I have carried home in these two hands
 The image of the Goddess, I am rid
 Of madness! And I urge you with a gift
 Of rugged rowers rowing you home to Argos!
 O my own sister, for our family's sake,
 Help me to save that family and ourselves!
 Unless you help me take the image back,
 This very day our family's name shall die.

980

985

The Fourth Maiden

Some God is visiting ancestral sin
 On the house of Tantalus.

Iphigenia

How I had dreamed, long, long before your coming,
 Of you and of my country! How my prayer
 Joins yours for the renewal of our breed—
 Even of his whose hand reached for my blood!
 Now that no blood of yours stains my own hand,
 I have no anger left, but only hope
 That in your life the family name shall live.

990

995

But if you leave me, taking Artemis,
 When the king sees the empty pedestal,
 What can I say? How can my life be saved
 Unless, with one quick stroke seizing the image,
 We flee together to your leaping deck?
 If we succeed, what happiness for me!
 But even if I fail, you need not fail.
 My life is little. I would gladly die
 To earn your safety and your reaching home.
 If a man die, a house, a name, is lost.
 But if a woman die, what does it matter?

1000

1005

Orestes

It mattered when my mother died! If now

E U R I P I D E S

You also were to die because of me—!
Whatever happen, we shall share one fate,
Alive in Greece, or here together dead.

1010

But by all signs, the Gods are on our side.
If Artemis were not, why should it be
Her Brother's oracle commanding me
To bring Her image back? She wishes it!
Here in Her Temple, in Her very presence,
Has come the omen of my finding you!
Yes, we are being guided by the Gods!

1015

Iphigenia

The king will kill us if we steal the statue.

Orestes

Then why not kill the king?

1020

Iphigenia

Anger the Gods

Again? He has been kind to me.

Orestes

Why not,

To save our lives, take chances with the Gods?

Iphigenia

I like your boldness. But it cannot be.

Orestes

What if you hid me somewhere in the temple?

Iphigenia

To steal out after dark?

1025

Orestes

Since I must steal,

The day for honest men, the night for thieves.

Iphigenia

Guards are on watch inside.

I PHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Orestes

How else are we—

Iphigenia

We might—

Orestes

Might what?

1030

Iphigenia

Make use of your misfortune.

Orestes

Women have ways of changing ill to good.

Iphigenia

I shall denounce you as a matricide.

Orestes

Make use of any good you find in that.

Iphigenia

As one unworthy to be sacrificed.

1035

Orestes

I understand—but not how it would serve us.

Iphigenia

You are unclean—cannot be purified—

Orestes

What will that do for us?

Iphigenia

except by deep

Sea-water, beyond stain, off from the shore.

Orestes

Yes, but our mission, you forget the statue—

1040

The reason for our coming here.

Iphigenia

She too,

Having been soiled by your approach, must be
Washed clean, the image too!*Orestes*

I see it now.

The inlet where the ship—

Iphigenia

strains at the leash.

Orestes

And you will bring the image there yourself!

Iphigenia

Nobody ever touches it but me.

1045

Orestes

But Pylades? Is he a murderer too?

Iphigenia

He aided you. He also must be cleansed.

Orestes

A story for the guards—but for the king?

*Iphigenia*In any case I could not keep it from him.
So he shall hear it and shall be persuaded.*Orestes*

Fifty stout oars are waiting for the word.

1050

Iphigenia

That is the part of it I leave to you.

Orestes

I have but one suggestion. Do these women

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S

Realize how much their loyalty might mean?
Women know women. Make your plea to them.
And after that we are in the hands of Heaven.

1055

Iphigenia

O friends who have been near and dear to me,
It may depend upon your carefulness
Whether or not I reach my home and kin.
A woman knows how much her weakness needs
The sympathy and help of other women, 1060
Their understanding and their loyalty.
I ask you only this, that you say nothing
Of what has happened here, that you keep silent.
The stillest tongue can be the truest friend.
We three must take a hair's-breadth chance between 1065
Capture and death, deliverance and home.
But if we do escape, then we shall work
For your deliverance, for you and you
To share our happiness at home in Hellas
And you and you. Holding your hand, I ask you—
Kissing your cheek. Clasping your knees, I ask you—
And you I ask by love of your two parents. 1070

(*To the Second Maiden.*)

And you by love of the child you left behind.
Who will say yes to me? Who could say no
When it might cost my brother's life and mine?

The First Maiden

Rely on me, dear Lady.

The Second Maiden

And on me.

1075

The Third Maiden

We shall do everything we can to help.

The Fourth Maiden

By Zeus we pledge silence and loyalty.

Iphigenia

May Heaven reward the hearts behind those words!

(*To Orestes and Pylades.*)

Now for your part—and yours—inside the temple.

The king will soon arrive and will be asking
Whether the strangers have been sacrificed.

1080

(*Orestes and Pylades enter the temple.*)

O gallant Goddess, having saved me once
At Aulis from my father's deadly hand,
Save with me now my brother and his friend,
Lest Phoebus be disproved because of Thee
And men forsake His oracle. O come
In gracious might away from this bleak place,
Away from gloom, to the lovely light of Athens.

1085

(*She follows into the temple.*)

The First Maiden

O sad-voiced ocean-bird, heard in the foam
Low by the rocky ledge
Singing a note unhappy hearts can hear,
The song of separation from your mate,
The moan of separation,
I have no wings to seek like you, but I
Can sing a song like you,
A song of separation from my mate.

1090

1095

The Second Maiden

At home in Hellas now my kinsmen gather
Where Artemis is due
To bless the new-born from her Cynthian hill
And soothe the mothers with the cooling palm
And bay and olive-tree,
Where once Latona loved the winding streams
And watched the rounded pools
White with the song-like motion of the swans.

1100

1105

The Third Maiden

Alas, the falling tears, the towers fallen,
 The taking of our towns!
 Alas, the clang of bright and angry spears
 Which drove me, captive, to an alien ship,
 Whence I was sold away
 To be an exile here, a handmaiden
 With Agamemnon's daughter,
 Doomed to the bloody rites of Artemis!

1110

1115

The Fourth Maiden

And at this altar where the sacrifice
 Is not of sheep but men,
 I envy those unhappy from their birth,
 For to be bred and seasoned in misfortune
 Is to be iron to it,
 But there is something in the pang of change
 More than the heart can bear,
 Unhappiness remembering happiness.

1120

The Second Maiden

Lady, a ship is here to take you home,
 And in the rowers' ears
 Pan shall be sounding all his pointed notes,
 Great mountains echoing to His little reed,
 And Phoebus on His lyre
 Shall strike profound the seven strings and sing
 To you of Attica,
 Shall sing to you of home and lead you there.
 Oar after oar shall dip and carry you,
 Lady, away from us,
 Oar after oar shall push the empty waves
 Wider, wider, leaving us lonely here,
 Leaving us here without you,
 And forward over the unceasing bow
 The sail shall faster run,
 Ever refilling with the unspent wind.

1125

1130

1135

The First Maiden

Oh to fly swifter than the wingèd sun
 Upon his dazzling track!—
 And not to let my golden light be folded
 Until I touch my house, my roof, my room, 1140
 From which I used to go
 To noble marriages and take my place
 In the bright company,
 Give them my hands and circle round and dance 1145
 And always try to be the loveliest,
 Under my mother's gaze,
 In my unrivaled radiance of attire
 And in the motion of my hands and feet,
 While my embroidered veil
 I would hold closely round me as I danced
 And bowed and hid my cheek
 Under the shadow of my clustering curls. 1150

(Enter King Thoas with Soldiers.)

Thoas

Where is my guardian of the temple gate,
 My Grecian girl? Where are the foreigners?
 Am I too late to see the sacrifice?
 Are the victims' bodies being burnt already? 1155

The Fourth Maiden

She is coming out herself and she will tell you.

(Iphigenia appears in the temple-door, carrying
 the wooden Artemis.)

Thoas

(Starting up the stairs.)

What does this mean, daughter of Agamemnon?
 Why have you moved the Goddess from her place?

Iphigenia

O King, stand back—stay back beyond the threshold!

I PHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Thoas

But what has happened that would call for this?

1160

Iphigenia

Back from contamination! I am abrupt.

Thoas

Speak bluntly to me. What?

Iphigenia

The offerings

You sent us for the Goddess are impure.

Thoas

How do you know? What makes you think—

Iphigenia

She turned

Away from them. She moved when they came near.

1165

Thoas

Mightn't it be a little bit of earthquake

That moved Her?

Iphigenia

No. She moved of Her own will

And even for a moment shut Her eyes.

Thoas

Because their hands were blood-stained? Was it that?

Iphigenia

It was Her divination of their guilt.

Thoas

You mean they'd killed a Taurian on the beach?

1170

Iphigenia

Their guilt was with them when they came—the crime
Of killing their own kin.

E U R I P I D E S

Thoas

What kin?

Iphigenia

Mother

Of one of them—a murder they had planned.

Thoas

O great Apollo, what barbarian
Would do the thing these Greeks have done!

Iphigenia

Greeks once

But now disowned by Greeks, driven from Hellas.

1175

Thoas

Even so, why bring the Goddess out?

Iphigenia

Defiled,

She must be purified, be cleaned again
By the touch of Her own sky.

Thoas

How could you know
What sort of crime these fellows had committed?

Iphigenia

I saw Her turn from them. I asked them why.

Thoas

You are a Greek, quick-witted, a true Greek.

1180

Iphigenia

They are Greek too, tried to propitiate me
With welcome news.

Thoas

Of Argos?

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S

Iphigenia

News of Orestes.

Of my brother,

Thoas

Thought they could weaken you.

Iphigenia

News that my father is alive and prospers.

1185

Thoas

But you were firm. You didn't let your feelings—

Iphigenia

What should I feel toward any Greek but hate?

Thoas

How shall we deal with them?

Iphigenia

By temple rules.

Thoas

Something besides the pitcher and the knife?

1190

Iphigenia

Complete immersion, for a sin like theirs.

Thoas

In the bubbling spring? Or is salt water best?

Iphigenia

The sea is the absorbent of all evil.

Thoas

Artemis says the sea?

Iphigenia

I say the sea.

1195

Thoas

Breakers are handy—just beyond the wall.

Iphigenia

But these especial rites are secret rites.

Thoas

Then choose your place; no one shall trespass on you.

Iphigenia

And I shall have to wash the Goddess too.

Thoas

Can a Goddess be defiled, the same as people?

1200

Iphigenia

Why did I have to bring Her from the temple?

Thoas

You are a pious woman and I thank you.

Iphigenia

Then will you issue orders for me?

Thoas

Name them.

Iphigenia

First have the strangers bound with rope.

Thoas

But why?

Where could they go?

Iphigenia

O King, beware of Greeks!

Thoas

(To his Soldiers.)

Bind them.

1205

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S

Iphigenia

And have them brought to me.

Thoas

And bring them.

Iphigenia

But cover both their heads with heavy cloth.

Thoas

To keep even the Sun from seeing them?

Iphigenia

Send soldiers with me.

Thoas

Take your pick of them.

Iphigenia

And have a herald tell all Taurians—

Thoas

To what?

Iphigenia

To stay indoors till this is done.

1210

Thoas

One step outdoors and they would be polluted.

Iphigenia

By matricide!

Thoas

(To Attendants.)

Go tell the herald this.

Iphigenia

Indoors they stay.

E U R I P I D E S

Thoas

My people do concern you!

Iphigenia

The one I am most concerned about—

Thoas

Who? Me?

Iphigenia

Has helpful work to do, inside the temple.

1215

Thoas

To—?

Iphigenia

Purify it with pine smoke from torches.

Thoas

The temple shall be sweet for your return.

Iphigenia

When they come out—

Thoas

What shall I do?

Iphigenia

Hold up

Your sleeve and shield your face.

Thoas

From the contagion.

Iphigenia

And if I seem delayed—

Thoas

How shall I tell?

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Iphigenia

Feel no surprise, be patient.

Thoas

You must do,
Carefully, everything the Goddess wants.

1220

Iphigenia

I trust that I can serve Her wish.

Thoas

And mine.

(*The temple doors open for an emerging procession.*)

Iphigenia

And here they come, the strangers in their robes,
And lambs whose blood is used instead of theirs,
And burning torches and the instruments
Needed for purifying them and Her.

1225

Taurians, turn away from the pollution.
Gate-tenders, open the gates, then wash your hands.
Men who want wives, women who want children,
Avoid contagion, keep away, away!

(*Holding the image high.*)

O Virgin Goddess, if the waves can wash
And purge the taint from these two murderers
And wash from Thee the tarnishing of blood,
Thy dwelling shall be clean and we be blest! . . .
To Thee and the All-Wise my silent prayer.

1230

(*She signals. The procession moves down the stairs.
Carrying the image, she leads the Soldiers and victims
from the foot of the stairs across the court and out to-
ward the sea. Thoas enters the temple with Attendants,
leaving in the courtyard only the Temple Maidens.*)

The Second Maiden

Latona bore one day a golden Child,

Brother of Artemis,
Phoebus, the darling of the vales of Delos—

1235

The First Maiden

Whose little fingers hovered on the harp
And pulled at archery.

The Second Maiden

Up from His birthplace, to Parnassus' top
The Mother brought Her Boy—

1240

The First Maiden

Where Dionysus vaults the waterfall.

The Third Maiden

There, hidden coiling in the leafy laurels,
A serpent with bright scales
And blood-red eyes, a creature born of Earth,
Guarded the cave that held Earth's oracle.

1245

Phoebus, beholding it, leaped up
Out of His Mother's arms, a little Child,
And struck the serpent dead—

1250

The Second Maiden

And on that day began His prophecies.

The Fourth Maiden

O Phoebus, having won the golden throne
And tripod of the truth,
Out of the very center of the Earth,
Thou couldst hear wisdom; and Thy voice conveyed,
Accompanied by all
The run and ripple of Castalian springs,
The deepest prophecies
That ever Earth heard whispered out of Heaven.

1255

The Third Maiden

But Earth had wished to save the oracle

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

For Themis, Her own daughter, 1260
 And so in anger bred a band of dreams
 Which in the night should be oracular
 To men, foretelling truth. 1265
 And this impaired the dignity of Phoebus
 And of His prophecies.

The Second Maiden

And the baby God went hurrying to Zeus, 1270
 Coaxed with His little hands and begged of Zeus
 To send the dreams away.

The First Maiden

And Zeus was very pleased to have His Son
 Come straight to Him with troubles. His great brow 1275
 Decided with a nod
 That Phoebus have his prize restored to Him,
 In spite of angry Earth,
 His throne, His listening throng, His golden voice . . .

The Fourth Maiden

That throats of night be stricken straightway mute 1280
 And plague mankind no more,
 That shapes of night no longer hold their power
 To foretell truth in syllables of gloom
 And haunt men's aching hearts—
 That men be freed from the prophetic dark
 And every shrouded form
 And listen only to the lips of light.

A Soldier

(*Entering headlong on the sea-path, wounded
 and breathless.*)

O temple ministrants and temple guards,
 Where is King Thoas? Open all your gates 1285
 And call King Thoas out! Summon the king!

The First Maiden

Am I allowed to ask why so much noise?

The Soldier

The two young prisoners have broken free,
With Agamemnon's daughter joining them,
And are taking Artemis aboard their ship!

1290

The Second Maiden

You have gone mad to dream of such a thing!

The First Maiden

A likely story! If you want the king,
He has left the temple. Go and look for him.

The Soldier

Tell me which way, because I have to find him.

1295

The First Maiden

I do not know which way.

The Third Maiden

None of us noticed.

The Second Maiden

Go look for him, tell him your crazy story.

The Soldier

O treacherous women, you're deceiving me,
You're in the plot yourselves!

1300

The Third Maiden

You make no sense.

What are these men to us? Go try the palace.

The Soldier

Not till I know what's happening right here.
Not till the keepers of the inner shrine
Have answered me! Ho! You inside! Unbar

The door! Is the king there? Tell him to hurry!
Tell him a soldier's out here—with bad news.

1305

(*He beats at the door. The door opens and Thoas appears.*)

Thoas

Why are you making this ungodly uproar?
Everyone's in a panic!

The Soldier

These women lied!
They said that you had left, they lied to me,
Tried not to let me find you!

1310

Thoas

What do you mean?
Why should they wish—

The Soldier

That will come later. Listen,
Oh listen first to me, listen to this!
Your Priestess, Iphigenial She has freed
The prisoners! They've stolen Artemis!
The ocean ceremony was a trick.

1315

Thoas

But why should she be playing tricks on me?

The Soldier

To save Orestes. Yes, I said Orestes!

Thoas

Orestes? What Orestes? Not her brother?

The Soldier

Whom we had brought to you for Artemis.

1320

Thoas

But that's impossible! How can I grasp it?

The Soldier

There isn't time to grasp it! You must say
 What's to be done about it! You must order
 Galleys to cut ahead of them and catch them!

Thoas

There's no escape for them. Our boats are out there, 1325
 So tell me how it happened. Everything.

The Soldier

It was just when we had reached the bend of shore
 Hiding their ship that Agamemnon's daughter
 Made signs for us to drop the rope which bound
 The men, to leave them and fall back. She said 1330
 That she was ready to begin the rites
 And light the mystic flame to bless the sea.
 But when she took the cord and led the boys
 Beyond the curve, we had a sudden feeling
 Something was wrong. We didn't know what to do. 1335
 We heard her voice call high mysterious words
 We'd never heard and thought that this must be
 The prayer she had to use for cleansing sin.

And then we waited a long time. At last 1340
 We were afraid the men had broken loose
 And killed her and escaped. And still we waited,
 Because you had forbidden us to look,
 But we suddenly decided to find out
 And hurried to the inlet. 1345

There we saw
 The ship from Hellas swaying near the beach,
 And fitted in the tholes were fifty oars
 Like feathers in a wing. And the two youths
 Were waist-deep by the stern. Sailors held poles
 For keeping the bow steady, others hauled 1350
 The anchor up. The rest had hands along the ropes
 Of a ladder hanging from the rail to help
 The Priestess. But we seized her in the water,
 Tugged at the ladder, ripped their rudder-oar 1355

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Away from them to cripple them and cried
 To the fellow facing us, "What kind of man
 Are you, stealing our Priestess and our Goddess?" 1360
 "I am Orestes, son of Agamemnon,
 I am her brother! Now you have the truth!
 And she is bound for Greece, out of which land
 I lost her long ago—bound home!" We tried
 To hold her, tried to drag her from their hands, 1365
 Which is the way I came by this and this.
 He struck my face, first one side, then the other.
 They had no weapons, we had none. We used
 Our fists and they their fists, and some their feet
 With kicks well-aimed at us from where they stood
 Above us—at our heads and hearts. We fought 1370
 And fought till we were winded. Then, with bruises
 And cuts and blood-filled eyes, we climbed the cliff
 And from above we pelted them with rocks.
 But the Greek archers had brought up their bows 1375
 And with their arrows kept us at a distance.

Then when a giant wave bore in on them,
 Orestes quickly lifted up his sister
 Out of the rush of it. Holding her high
 On his left shoulder, plunging stride by stride, 1380
 He caught a ladder, climbed aboard the ship
 And set her safe on deck. And she, she held—
 She had it still—the statue out of Heaven,
 The image of the Daughter of High Zeus. 1385

We heard a glad voice ringing through the ship,
 "O mariners of Hellas, grip your oars
 And clip the sea to foam! O let your arms
 Be strong, for we have won, have won, have won
 What we set out to win! Soon we shall leave
 The jagged Clashing Rocks behind! Pull hard!" 1390

A shout of joy resounded and the ship
 Quivered with dipping oars and shot ahead.
 But this was only while the shelter lasted;
 For at the harbor-mouth the sharp wind threw her
 High on a heavy swell shoreward again.

Her oarsmen rallied, strained, but every time
1395
They made a gain, a great wave drove her back.
Then Agamemnon's daughter stood and prayed:
"Oh save me, Artemis, from this grim place!
Help us all home to Hellas! And forgive
Theft of the image at Thy Brother's bidding!
As He is dear to Thee, so mine to me!" 1400

The sailors roared their echoes to her prayer,
And bent their bodies and their great bare arms
And shoulders, swinging like the sea,
To the boatswain's cry. But closer to the cliff, 1405
Closer they drew and closer still. And some
Sprang out into the water and began
Trying to fasten hold on the sharp rocks
With ropes. And then our soldiers sent me here
To tell you what has happened. So bring cord 1410
And chains, O King, for if the sea stays rough,
There's not a chance that they can get away.

Poseidon, Ocean's God, mindful of Troy,
The city which He loved, is punishing
The impious children of her enemies,
And will deliver to the King of Tauris
The son and daughter of the King of Argos—
That daughter who, forgetful now of Aulis, 1415
Betrays the Goddess who was good to her.

The First Maiden

O Lady, Lady! Fate is yielding you
1420
To Taurian hands again.
You and your brother surely now shall die.

Thoas

Come, citizens, and be uncivilized!
Leap on your horses! Whip them to the beach!
There we can wait until a billow splits
That ship from Hellas. Then go after them!
And hunt them down, every damned dog of them! 1425
Do this for Artemis. And some of you

I P H I G E N I A I N T A U R I S

Go launch my galleys, lest one man of them
Should die untortured! Run them down by sea
And land! Go hurl them from the cliffs!
Oh catch them, crush them, crucify them—kill them! 1430

And as for you, you miserable women,
Count on the punishment which you have earned
By treachery! That punishment can wait—
With this to do. But oh when this is done!

*(Above the confusion appears, with instant
dominion, Pallas Athena.)*

Athena

Quiet, King Thoas! What is all this tumult? 1435
Hold the chase back and listen to Athena.
Hold all your soldiers back. Yes, all of them.

Apollo sent Orestes to your country
To set him free from the Avenging Furies,
Ordered him, through an oracle, to bring 1440
Iphigenia home again to Argos
And the sacred statue home to Her own land.
You have the story. But there's one addition—
The fact that this Orestes you would hunt
Is gliding on a comfortable sea.

Poseidon made it smooth. I asked Him to. 1445

Orestes! Gods are heard at any distance.
Though you are far away, you still can hear me.
Do this. Take back your sister and the statue
Safely to Hellas. Pause at God-built Athens.
Then, passing through, continue to the end 1450
Of Attica and find a holy place
Close to Carystus' hill, a place called Halae.
There build a temple. There set up the image,
That men may flock to Her with happy hymns.
Name it for Tauris, to immortalize
Your flight from home, your rescue from the Furies,
Your penitence and your deliverance. 1455

And let this be the law. When they observe
Her festival, the priest shall hold,

E U R I P I D E S

In memory of you, the sharp blade of his knife
 Against a human throat and draw one drop
 Of blood, then stop—this in no disrespect
 But a grave reminder of Her former ways.

1460

Iphigenia! Steps are cut in rock
 At Brauron for a shrine to Artemis.
 You shall reside as keeper of the keys there
 And at your death you shall be buried there
 And honored in your tomb with spotless gifts,
 Garments unworn, woven by hands of women
 Who honorably died in giving birth.

1465

These loyal maidens, Thoas, I command you
 To send back home.

Orestes, once I saved you
 When I was arbiter on Ares' hill
 And broke the tie by voting in your favor.
 Now let it be the law that one who earns
 An evenly divided verdict wins
 His case. Therefore go safely from this land,
 O son of Agamemnon. And you, Thoas,
 Enjoy the taste of swallowing your wrath.

1470

Thoas

The man who thinks he ever stood a chance
 Against the Gods was born a fool. And so
 I hold no slightest grievance toward Orestes
 Or Iphigenia. They may keep the statue.
 There isn't even any dignity
 In challenging a God. So off with them.
 May Artemis be happy in their land.

1475

I bid these women also, since I have to,
 A pleasant trip to Hellas. Thy word holds
 For all my captains too. Call back the galleys!
 Here are my spirit—and my spear—bowed down.

1480

1485

Athena

In doing as you must, you learn a law
 Binding on Gods as well as upon men.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

O winds of Heaven, speed Orestes home,
And I will guide him on his way to Athens
And will save Thy likeness, Artemis, my Sister.

The First Maiden

Smooth seas to them and may their journey's end
Become unending joy!

1490

The Fourth Maiden

Pallas Athena, let us prove Thy name
As hallowed upon earth as in high Heaven.

The Third Maiden

And let us take to heart
Thy unexpected but so welcome words.

1495

The Second Maiden

Command us with Thy grace,
O Conqueror of anger and of fear,
Award us wiser ways.

The First Maiden

Undo our troubled guile, crown us with Truth.

1499

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